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METAVISIONS: ENTRANCES AND EXITS IN TOM STOPPARD'S *ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD*.

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To my husband.

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A man had need have sound ears to hear himself frankly criticised; and as there are few who can endure to hear it without being nettled, those who hazard the undertaking of it to us manifest a singular effect of friendship; for 'tis to love sincerely indeed, to venture to wound and offend us, for our own good. (Montaigne)

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ABSTRACT

Throughout this dissertation a dual objective has been kept in mind: first, to validate Stoppard's parodic method of composition, and secondly, to account for the implicit cosmovisions that are compared and contrasted by means of framing techniques within the play.

Concerning form, I have traced the procedures by which earlier texts are integrated and transformed in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, which center around the selection, assemblage and artistry with which the borrowed parts and ideas are interwoven.

As for content, I have tried to show that the foregrounding of form within the play, in a sense, makes the form become the content of the work. Thus, the metatheatrical devices that the playwright employs dramatize the ideas that he has wished to project. By exploring the framing structure, characterization, language, the intertwined themes of metatheatricality and death, I have sought to demonstrate how Stoppard illustrates man's existential confusion and search. By comparing and contrasting both the Shakespearean and the modern tragic sense, evidence has been provided that the playwright offers the audience several perspectives from which to build their own vision: to see a whole world in a grain of sand or to detect nothingness in the vast firmament depends,

as great poets and philosophers have stated, not on the world, but on the answer given by the individual to this world.

In relation to literary theory, I have adopted a poststructuralist approach, where the concepts of parody, allusion, intertextuality, text-conciousness, metatheatricality, framing techniques and the author as scriptor have enabled me to describe and account for a play in which the very relationship of life and art is pervasively debated.

Within this theoretical framework, I have also tried to account for what the term originality means within a postmodern context, showing how Stoppard defies the traditional notion of originality, inserting himself in the contemporary trend of postmodern writing.

RESUMO

Ao longo dessa dissertação, persegui um objetivo duplo: primeiro, validar o método paródico de composição de Tom Stoppard, e segundo, dar conta das cosmovisões implícitas que são comparadas e contrastadas por meio de técnicas de moldura dentro da peça.

Em relação a forma, procurei traçar os procedimentos pelos quais textos anteriores são integrados e transformados em Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, técnicas essas que giram em torno da seleção, composição e artisticidade com as quais textos e idéias tomadas emprestadas de outros autores são costuradas.

Em relação ao conteúdo, tentei demonstrar que ao privilegiar a forma na peça, em certo sentido, Stoppard faz com que a própria forma se torne o conteúdo do trabalho. Deste modo, os recursos metateatrais que o dramaturgo emprega dramatizam as próprias idéias que ele desejou projetar no texto. Ao explorar a estrutura de molduras, a caracterização das personagens, a linguagem e os temas interligados da metateatralidade e da morte, procurei transmitir de que maneira Stoppard ilustra a busca e a confusão existencial humana. Ao comparar e contrastar o sentido do trágico em Shakespeare e no mundo atual, evidenciou-se que o dramaturgo oferece à platéia muitas perspectivas atráves das quais construir sua própria visão: ver

o mundo num grão de areia ou detectar o nada no vasto firmamento depende, como disseram grandes poetas e filósofos, não do mundo em si, mas da resposta dada pelo indivíduo a esse mundo.

Em termos de teoria literária, adotei uma metodologia pos-estruturalista onde os conceitos de paródia, alusão, intertextualidade, auto-consciência do texto, metateatralidade, técnicas de moldura e o autor como *scriptor* me permitiram descrever e dar conta de uma peça em que a própria relação da vida com a arte é debatida.

Neste contexto teórico, tentei mostrar como Stoppard desafia a noção tradicional de originalidade e se insere na corrente literária pós-moderna.

I INTRODUCTION: THE CRITICS' ANXIETY FOR TOM STOPPARD'S ORIGINALITY

'Would I had phrases that are not known, utterances that are strange, in a new language that has not been used, free from repetition, not an utterance which has grown stale, which men of old have spoken.
(Khakheperresenb - an Egyptian scribe of 2000 B.C.)

Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead[1] is, as its title overtly advertises, a parody of Hamlet.[2] Stoppard's play has been greatly criticized for its derivativeness and lack of originality, as being a mere shadow of Shakespeare, Beckett and the theatre of the Absurd. Versions of this initial critical opinion are still to be found in recent studies. I aim at responding to this critical scepticism of the play's originality by investigating it from various perspectives: the framing structure, characterization, language and style, metatheatricality and theme, and a comparison of the different world-visions implied in the text. By examining these several aspects, I intend to demonstrate how Stoppard's parodic method of composition includes many postmodern strategies and characteristics.

RG is Stoppard's first professional play and one of his most popular works. It was initially presented on the fringes of the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in August 1967. Though it was widely

acclaimed in a new and longer version at the National Theatre at the Old Vic in London in that same year, and received the 1967 John Whiting Award, the 1968 Evening Standard Award for the most promising playwright, and the 1968 Tony and the Drama Critic's Circle Best Play Awards, it has, nevertheless, opened a battlefield populated by critcs both for and against Stoppard's work.

Among the first negative critiques in 1967, Philip HOPE-WALLACE described the London production as "a tedious witty theatrical trick".[3] John WEIGHTMAN judged it as "a brilliant idea, inadequately worked out" while questioning "its lack of seriousness"[4], and John Russell TAYLOR acknowledged its cleverness and ingenuity, but argued that it offered nothing new:

> (...) if you know your way around Beckett and early Pinter, not to mention a shoal of minor followers, you will be likely to find the road Rosencrantz and Guildenstern follow to dusty death all too familiar and uneventful to be worth travelling for a whole evening.[5]

However, the play was also celebrated by critics, among them Irving WARDLE, who praised it as "an amazing piece of work with frank debts to Pirandello and Beckett, (...) which prove a route towards theatrical brilliance and powerful feeling".[6] Harold HOBSON and Ronald BRYDEN saluted it, respectively, as "the most important event in the British Professional theatre"[7], and "the most brilliant dramatic debut of the sixties".[8]

The polemics continued. Robert BRUSTEIN, Andrew KENNEDY and Normand BERLIN somehow summarize the negative reception toward RG. BRUSTEIN called it

> a theatrical parasite, feeding off Hamlet, Waiting for Godot, and Six Characters in Search of an Author, (...) an immensely shrewd exercise enlivened more by cunning than by conviction, a work without any real weight or texture, (...) the product of a university wit which though amusing fails to justify the 'violation' of Shakespeare's text.[9]

KENNEDY complained that it was the play's parodic quality which prevented it from seriously dealing with the important issues it raised: "Stoppard's parody (...) has no centre of feeling, it is anaesthetized".[10] BERLIN, likewise, saw it as an "extremely intellectual play", somewhat "thin and shallow", especially when Stoppard "meditates on large philosophical issues", lacking the "feeling and emotion we associate with Godot and Hamlet".[11]

It is only in the late 70's and 80's that RG achieves a certain positive unanimity among critics. Since then, it has been positively related to Hamlet, Waiting for Godot[12], the theatre of the Absurd, Ludwig Wittgenstein's work on language and logic[13] and to literary theorists such as George Steiner.[14] However, due to the short length of these essays, they have failed to provide textual evidence and theoretical justification for the intertextualities and influences they list, which is precisely the aim of this dissertation. The negative critiques, for their part, have had the merit of clearly asserting the targets challenged by Stoppard's method of composition: certain

concepts of originality, text and authorship. By investigating how these concepts have been regarded differently throughout literary history, I aim at validating Stoppard's creative compositional technique.

Originality has not always been a desirable aesthetic principle in poetics. The very idea of originality, though mentioned in all theories of poetry, from the classics to our day, refers to different concepts: it has meant both the power of finding and imitating subject matter as found in nature - as in the mimetic theories of Plato and Aristotle[15] - as well as the idea of imitating other writers - as in neo-classicisism. Invention, thus, has meant, both copying from the **world** of God and nature, or from the **word** of past writers.

The Renaissance is precisely the period in which there occurs a shift from the medieval disregard for and the neo-classic preoccupation with the concept of originality and the author-figure. W.J. BATE, in The Burden of the Past and the English Poet considers the problem of originality as "the principal dilemma (...) facing the artist from the Renaissance to the present day"[16], a kind of "self-created prison" in which the artist finds himself trapped. Thus, within Renaissance art we encounter both the artist who felt free to copy from the Classics as well as the first symptoms of an excessive preoccupation with originality which will mark Neoclassicism, Romanticism and the moderns.

Shakespeare, like Stoppard, neither invents plots, nor is he completely original in devising his best known lines, which were many times inspired in other sources. Speeches such as "There's nothing

good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Ham 2:2.240), "Readiness is all" (Ham 5.2.195), as well as the famous "What a piece of work is a man" (Ham 2.2.286) derive from Medieval and Renaissance texts and authors, specially Montaigne. In fact, plagiarism is widespread in Elizabethan England and originality and authorship are clearly not part of the épistème[17] of the time. John WAIN writes that "Shakespeare's art, unlike the characteristic modern writer's, does not depend on striking out brand-new material, but rather on the fusing together in a new whole the components that had become familiar inmates of the European consciousness."[18] Shakespeare's greatness lies precisely in his capacity to adapt and amalgamate thoughts, ideas and speeches into new forms.

To exemplify, in Hamlet, the plot is borrowed from the Danish legend of Hamlet[19], and from Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy[20]; the style derives from the Senecan tragedies.[21] Apart from that, there are many scenes in Shakespeare's plays which are written as a direct parody of the style in vogue at the time, as for example, the play-within-the play in Hamlet. This led a fellow dramatist, George GREENE, to accuse Shakespeare of being a plagiarist, "an upstart crow beautified with our own feathers".[22] In my view, the fact that both Shakespeare and Stoppard have been accused of derivativeness indicates that Stoppard's self-conscious parodic method of composition constitutes one more tribute to his predecessor, as Stoppard proves that he too is able to condense and recreate several theatrical tendencies.

According to BATE, it is with Neoclassicism and Romanticism that the concept of originality deepens and spreads, "setting a precedent with which the intellectual has since been condemned to live"[23] :

> (...) the eighteenth century Enlightenment had created and had foisted upon itself and its immediate child - not to mention its later descendants - an ideal of originality sanctioned both officially (theoretically, intellectually) and, in **potentia**, popularly.[24]

The Neoclassic legacy, which led the Romantics to the exaltation of the individual creative imagination, comes to the forefront of aesthetic discussion: the writer as genius, a semi-god, the redeemer of the world, the source of all art; writing as a unique and spontaneous overflow of emotions, a projection of a privileged mind.[25] The thrust on individuality and originality has persisted until today, as it is evident in the negative critiques of RG.

With the advent of modernist writers, specifically the work and theory of T. S. ELIOT, there is a marked attempt to reconcile the praise of originality and genius with the idea of tradition. The Waste Land (1920), in its juxtaposition of images and allusions of past and present, in its long sequence of allegories, quotations, parodies from diverse sources - the Bible, the Sanscrit language, Heraclitus, Shakespeare, Dante, Baudelaire, Joyce and others - shows that the art of the poet becomes, in the 20th century, the assemblage and actualization of a cultural and literay heritage in a new and meaningful synthesis.

To a certain extent, then, Stoppard follows the path opened by Eliot: both writers borrow extensively and consciously from other writers and works, recovering, by means of great labour and not mere inheritance, the tradition that comes before them. This is what ELIOT understands by historical sense, which

> involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous order.[26]

The historical sense is what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place and time, of his own contemporaneity for "no poet, no artist has his complete meaning alone".[27] From this perspective, to label RG as a 'theatrical parasite', as critics have done, shows, at the very least, a lack of awareness of ELIOT's critical theories, which had been published half a century before Stoppard's play was written. In reworking the plot of Hamlet and in dealing with many other intertextualities - Beckett's Godot, Pirandello's Six Characters, Eliot's "Prufrock", among others - Stoppard accounts for the past history of drama, as he writes with the sense of the pastness of the past and of its presence. His reworkings constitute an attempt to absorb and incorporate the landmarks of drama. If he seems, at times, to surrender completely to the Shakespearean text, as there are some long extracts from Hamlet in RG, this is a conscious parodic surrender

which aims at providing continuity to the literary heritage of the past, while permitting critical distance and change.

Even though ELIOT manages to reconcile the weight of tradition and the individual talent, he still retains the notion of individuality and of the author as creator, which is partly his inheritance from the Romantics. His notions of parody, allusion and intertextuality have, to some extent, anticipated Linda HUTCHEON's theory of parody.[28] She views parody as a valid literary device which, rather than being pejorative, constitues a creative and critical tool for recycling the past tradition.

By investigating the etimology of the term, HUTCHEON shows that the Greek word **parodia** is composed of the suffix **ode**, which means **song**, and the prefix **para**, which means both **counter** (against) and **beside** (alongside). She recovers this second sense in order to extend the concept: parody is a bitextual synthesis where repetition implies critical distance and re-creation. Thus, she reaches a positive definition of 20th century parody where it becomes a constructive principle in literary history, a process of revising and transcontextualizing previous works of art without necessarily destroying or ridiculing them.

In the light of HUTCHEON's theory, the parodic nature of Stoppard's work becomes an act of creative synthesis, where theatrical conventions and the world views embodied in them are put **alongside** and **against** each other. In the case of RG, the world of Shakespeare is transposed to the 20th century stage and intermingled with echoes

from other writers. The end-product of these recreations is not, as some have implied, a parasitic and random collage; neither is it intended to attack and criticize its sources. It aims, rather, at constructing a new text which self-consciously borrows, recontextualizes and incorporates styles, techniques and genres.

This text-consciousness is a new way of presenting the relationship between life and art. Instead of mimetically reproducing the world, of mirroring reality, the metafictional or metatheatrical text problematizes the very act of telling or dramatizing the story. In other words, rather than "holding a mirror up to nature" (Ham 3.2.18) as Hamlet puts it, art holds a mirror to itself. HUTCHEON denominates the first attitude - to hold a mirror up to nature - as 'mimesis of product' and the second - to hold a mirror to itself - as 'mimesis of process'.[29] The mimesis of process, the self-consciousness of the art work, though present in a minor form in the literature of the past, has only become a major characteristic in the twentieth century. It does not, however, negate the previous literary mode founded on the mimesis of product; rather, it forms a continuum with it, as a literary text can include both the traditional mimetic element, and, at the same time, pursue a reflection on fictionality.

HUTCHEON's as well as Patricia WAUGH's understanding of metafictionality, though mainly concerned with the novel, are revelant to the literary phenomena as a whole. The theoretical background these two authors provide constitutes a useful tool for understanding

the attitudes and procedures of contemporary dramatists. WAUGH defines metafiction as

> a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.[30]

HUTCHEON offers us a similar definiton of the term:

> Metafiction, as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity.[31]

Dealing basically with dramatic works, Lionel ABEL has named drama that deals with drama as metatheatre.[32] Likewise, June SCHLUETER asserts, in Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama, that the artist's preoccupation and awareness of his own art is not something new in the history of drama. The chorus of Greek tragedy represents "the earliest extant evidence in Western drama of a playwright's artistic awareness".[33] The devices of prologues, epilogues, asides, direct addresses and the play-within-the-play, used in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, also constitute early examples of self-consciousness. However, it is only in the 20th century that this self-consciousness, present in many forms in the previous history of drama - specially so in Hamlet, becomes a major preoccupation between fictionists, poets, critics and playwrights.

Apart from HUTCHEON's, WAUGH's and SCHLUETER's concepts, there are other poststructuralist theories which illuminate RG, especially those dealing with the notion of intertextuality. Even though the term greatly varies from theorist to theorist - it is used by Julia Kristeva, the new critics, Gerard Genette, Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes -, in general terms, it is understood as the relation between texts which have an effect upon the way the intertext is read.[34] In BAKHTIN, for example, intertextuality serves to reinterpret the idea of influence, thus emphasizing the dialogic element of all utterances, and displacing the writer as the text's centre of authority: instead of having an authorial presence, the author's voice is just one among the network of beliefs and power-relationships. Parody and travesty are, according to him, important tools in constructing a polyphonic text and creating linguistic consciousness[35]:

> (...)every type of parody or travesty (...) is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid but a hybrid comprehends two orders: one linguistic and one stylistic (...)It is the nature of every parody to transpose the values of the parodied style, to highlight certain elements while leaving others in the shade. Thus, it is that in parody two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and, in the final analysis, two speaking subjects.[36]

It is this movement of transposing certain characteristics from one dramatic form to another - from the Shakespearean tragedy to the Beckettian 20th century fragmentary idiom and absurd tragi-comic world - that Stoppard makes his text perform.

BARTHES partakes of Bakhtin's understanding of intertextuality; for him, the literary work is not a separate and self-sufficient structure that represents reality. Departing from Saussure's idea of the arbitrariness of the sign, he considers that language which tries to pass itself off as natural, and as representing the world, is ideological. In literature, an ideological use of language would be the project of realism which masks the social construction of language. The modern text fights the naturalization of the sign, of literature, and of language, by offering multiple meanings and codes which, rather than being hierarchically organized, coexist. In a word, the modern text is intertext:

> Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc, pass into the text, and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located: of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks.[37]

It is the polysemic character of language and of the world that speaks up in literature rather than the author, whom BARTHES discards as having no authority over the text. In "The Death of the Author", he describes the dessacralization of the place and figure of the author and his interiority, and subtitutes it for the modern scriptor who is simultaneously born with the open-ended and multiple text. The author, he holds, is a modern figure "(...)emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal

faith of the Reformation".[38] The text no longer represents the world, but rather, it performs verbal forms: language, the verbal condition of literature, enunciates itself in a multi-dimensional space where many voices coexist. Writing becomes that "neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing".[39] RG is this neutral space where the voices of Shakespeare, Pirandello, Beckett, Eliot and Stoppard merge and lose identity.

According to these post-structuralist theories, therefore, the author is dead and replaced by a text which is no longer viewed as a structure with a centre, but as a 'process of structuration' in which the reader and the critic creatively participate. Stoppard can be viewed as playing this Barthesian game, in that his very process of composition is similar to the reader's function as he critically reads the Shakespearean matrix, and ingeniously rewrites it through his randomly linguistic choices of what determinations he finds there. Morevoer, he becomes, at the same time, critic and scriptor by reflecting on writing in the 20th century, by operating the displacement of the author as the central figure in the text, by deconstructing the concepts of genius and originality, and by maximizing influence and allusion: writing, for him, means parody and intertext. As BARTHES says, "if an author comes to speak of a past text, he can only do so by himself producing a new text. (...) There are no more critics, only writers".[40]

In the body of this dissertation, I will explore this text-consciousness which in the theatre takes the form of metatheatricality, showing how Stoppard rather than mimetically representing 'reality', aims at revealing the constructed, discursive and representational nature of reality and the text. In Chapter 2, the framing techniques and mise-en-abyme structure of RG will be dealt with, showing how they hold a mirror to our 20th century experience of reality and, self-reflexively call attention to the play's process of composition. In Chapter 3, I will examine how the personages are intended not as traditional, consistent and believable characters, but as language constructions with multiple identities. In Chapter 4, I will survey Stoppard's use of language, which is rendered through playful strategies, where one side of the coin stands for the Shakespearean verbal idiom, and the other for the Beckettian language misunderstandings. In Chapter 5, the main theme of the play, death, is explored in a methatheatrical context. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will try to bring together the previous chapters by clarifying the implicit comparison of world-views - that of Shakespeare and that of Beckett - which lies at the basis of Stoppard's own vision. Throughout the body of this dissertation the problematics of originality will be under scrutinity.

NOTES:

[1]All references to Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, hereafter RG, are taken from the following revised edition: London, Faber and Faber, 1980. All quotations from the play will come in parenthesis, in the abbreviated form RG, followed by page numbers. I use Stoppard's own abbreviations of Ros and Guil to refer to the play's main characters. It should, therefore, be easy to differentiate betwen Stoppard's attendant lords and Shakespeare's ones, who are referred to as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

[2]All references to W. Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark are taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare, edited by Philip Edwards, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985. All quotations from the play will come in parenthesis in the abbreviated form Ham, followed by a reference to the act, scene and line. I have used the convention by which a quotation from Act one, Scene one lines one to five, for example, is rendered as (Ham 1.1.1-5).

[3]HOPE-WALLACE, P. Extract from Guardian (12 April 1967). In: BAREHAM, T., ed. Tom Stoppard: a Selection of Critical Essays. London, Macmillan, 1990. p. 90.

[4]WEIGHTMAN, J. Mini-Hamlets in Limbo. Encounter, 29 (1): 38, Jul., 1972.

[5]TAYLOR, J. R. The Road to Dusty Death. Plays and Players, 14(9):13, Jun. 1967.

[6]WARDLE, I. Extract from The Times (12 April 1967). In: BAREHAM, p. 71.

[7]HOBSON, H. Honour your Partner. Sunday Times, London, 3 Jul 1974. p. 46.

[8]BRYDEN, J. Theatre: Windy Excitement. Observer, London, 28 Aug. 1968. p.15.

[9]BRUSTEIN, R. Waiting for Hamlet. Plays and Players, 15:52, Jan. 1968.

[10]KENNEDY, A. Old and New in London Now. Modern Drama, 11: 445, 1968.

[11]BERLIN, N. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead:* The Theatre of Criticism. Modern Drama, 16:270, Dec. 1973.

[12]All references to Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, hereafter abbreviated as Godot, are taken from the following edition: London, Jarrold and Sons, 1979. All the quotations will come in parenthesis as WG, followed by the page number. See particularly these articles for RG's relation to Beckett's Godot and the theatre of the Absurd: KRUSE, A. Tragicomedy and Tragic Burlesque: *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.* Sydney Studies in English, 1:76-96, 1975/76; GIANAKARIS, C. J. Absurdism Altered: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are*

Dead. Drama Survey, 7:52-8, Winter, 1969; DUNCAN, J. E. Godot Comes: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.* Ariel, 12(4):57-70, Oct. 1981; CALLEN, A. Stoppard's Godot: Some French Influences on Post-War English Drama. New Theatre Magazine, 10(1):22-30,Winter, 1969.

[13] WITTGENSTEIN, L. The Philosophical Investigations. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958. See the following articles for the exploration of Stoppard's philosophical concerns in RG: SIMARD, R. The Logic of Unicorns: Beyond Absurdism in Stoppard. Arizona Quarterly, 38(1):37-44, Spring 1982; SCHWANITZ, D. The Method of Madness: Tom Stoppard's Theatrum Logico-Philosophicum. In: BOCK, H. & WERTHEIM, A.E., eds. Essays on Contemporary British Drama. München, Huber, 1981, p.131-54; DAVIDSON, M.R. Transcending Logic: Stoppard, Wittgenstein and Aristophanes. In: WHITE, K.S., ed. Alogical Modern Drama. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1982. p.39-60; LEVENSON, J. Hamlet Andante/ Hamlet Allegro: Tom Stoppard's two versions. Shakespeare Survey, 36 : 21-8, 1983.

[14] STEINER, G. The Death of Tragedy. London, Faber, 1974. For an article comparing Steiner's work to RG, see KRUSE, A. Tragicomedy and Tragic Burlesque: *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.* Sydney Studies in English, 1:76-96, 1975/76.

[15]The basic difference between Plato's and Aristotle's theories in relation to the idea of mimesis is that, for the former, the poet makes copies of copies of the true reality, and for the latter, poetry imitates human action. Thus, in Book X of The Replublic, Plato seeks to exclude the arts from the state, on the grounds that they present a mere copy "thrice removed from truth". In other words, the term imitation is derogatory in Plato, while in Aristotle it is not. (See PREMINGER, A., ed. Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990. p.639-640.)

[16]BATE, W. The Burden of the Past and the English Poet. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991. p.vii.

[17]The term épistème was used by Michel Foucault and later adopted by other theorists such as Jacques Derrida. In the sense I am employing it, it refers to the totality of a historical period during which relations, discoursive practices and laws of transformation are constant and stable. Similar concepts are paradigm shift introduced by Thomas S. Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962) and problematic as used by Louis Althusser. The definition of épistème and paradigm shift as employed here are in HAWTHORN, J. A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory. London, Edward Arnold, 1992. p.58, 126, 140-1.)

[18]WAIN, J. The Living World of Shakespeare. London, Penguin, 1964. p.31. WAIN also remarks that as we learn about Shakespeare's sources and get into his works, "it seems to us that we are listening, not to the words of one man, but to things that come direct from the imagination of mankind itself." (p. 35)

[19]Bernard LOTT says that Shakespeare's Hamlet contains many elements of the Hamlet legend, which, as historical evidence suggests, is based on events occuring prior to the Norman Conquest. The story of Amleth is part of the thirteenth century

folk literature of Iceland and Denmark; it is, however, only printed around 1514. In 1570, Francis Belleforest translates it into French, including it in the fifth volume of his Histoires Tragiques. As it is only translated into English in 1608, LOTT assumes that Shakespeare must have known the story from a lost earlier play of Hamlet which is also based on the same tale. From LOTT's account of the Saxo's story, we know that Shakespeare keeps the names of Hamlet (Amleth) and Gertrude (Gerutha), as well as the core of the plot, which is basically the revenge of Amleth, whose uncle killed his father and married his mother, thus ascending to the throne. Other points in common between Shakespeare's plot and the Saxo story are the pretended madness of the hero in the course of his revenge, the spying of a beautiful girl and her father, the latter ending up killed by Amleth in Gerutha's bedroom, the sending of Amleth to England accompanied by two friends, the changing of the letter which seals his fate, the death of these two friends, Amleth's return to the palace, Amleth's killing of his uncle, and his death. (See LOTT, B., ed. Introduction to *Hamlet*. In: ____. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. London, Longman, 1968. p. xvii-xxi.)

[20]Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1587) is an acknowledged source for Shakespeare's Hamlet. Basically, it is the story of a father who avenges the murder of his son by having enacted a play-within-the-play which rather than revealing the guilt of the murderer, serves to kill the murderer during a make-believe show. (See LOTT, p. xvii-xix.)

[21]The Senecan tragedies, a style associated with the Roman playwright Lucius Seneca, are also considered as sources for Shakespeare. DELUMEAU holds that the Senecan influence in the theatre just before Shakespeare's time is great: though these tragedies are not conceived for the stage, and despite the fact that there is no real action, the public of the time greatly appreciated the monstrous crimes and implacable revenges. One of the stock elements of this type of tragedy is the ghost, a restless spirit urging for action and vengeance. (See DELUMEAU, J. A Civilização do Renascimento. Lisboa, Estampa, 1984. p.112. Also see LOTT, p. xviii)

[22]Greene's complaint of Shakespeare's plagiarism is common knowledge among the Shakespearean critics. It is a point worth of notice the fact that Shakespeare makes a parody of Greene's critical commentary in Ham 2.1.110, when Polonius reads Hamlet's love-letter, which contains the word beautified and Polonius then remarks, "That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; beautified is a vile phrase".

[23]BATE, p.105

[24]BATE, p.106.

[25]The Romantic writer places the individual as the subject and source of the narrative; in talking about the self, the Romantics believe they are talking about the world as a whole. The Romantics' search for individuality and for a unique vision of reality is correlated to the need for originality in writing, disregarding, to a certain extent, models and the place of tradition. It represents a shift from the imitation of nature or of models to the exaltation of the individual creative imagination: the idea of the "poeta vates" and of the poet as genius take the form of Victor Hugo's poet as a semi-god and Lord Byron's poet as the redeemer. Among the romantics,

Wordsworth, for example, in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". See NOYES, R. English Romantic Poetry and Prose. New York, Oxford University Press, 1956. p. 358.

[26]ELIOT, T. S. Tradition and the Individual Talent. In: HAYWARD, J., ed. Selected Prose: T. S. Eliot. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1953. p. 23.

[27]HAYWARD, p. 23.

[28]HUTCHEON, L. A Theory of Parody. London, Methuen, 1984. 375p.
In fact, Eliot's theory anticipates much of the critical thought on parody, allusion and intertextuality of the eighties. In order to account for and legitimize Stoppard's method of composition, a new understanding of the term "parody", such as the one provided by Hutcheon becomes essential.

[29]HUTCHEON, L. Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox. London, Methuen, 1984. p. 4-5.

[30]WAUGH, P. Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self- Conscious Fiction. London, Methuen, 1984. p. 2.

[31]HUTCHEON, Narcissistic Narrative, p.1.

[32]ABEL, L. Metatheatre: a New View of Dramatic Form. New York, Hill and Wang, 1963.

[33]SCHLUETER, J. Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama. New York, Columbia University Press, 1979. p. 2.

[34] The notion of intertextuality, or transtextuality, has been employed by many critics, among them Gerard Genette, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Brian Mchale, David Lodge, etc. See HAWTHORN, p. 85-87.

[35]BAKHTIN describes linguistic consciousness as "parodying the direct word, the direct style, exploring its limits, its absurd sides, the face specific to an era". It is "a new mode developed for working creatively with language" in which the creative artist must "look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from the point of view of a potentially different language and style (...) The creating consciousness stands , as it were, on the boundary lines between language and style(...)" (p.139.) (See BAKHTIN M. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In: HOLQUIST, M., ed. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Austin, University of Texas Press. 1984. p.139-140.) For a comprehensive understanding of Bakhtin's ideas see TODOROV, T. Mikhail Bakhtine: le principe dialogique. Paris, Seuil, 1981. Todorov holds that Bakhtin surpasses the dichotomy form versus content through the concept of dialogism, i.e., the intertextual dimension of the text: "(...) chaque discours entre en dialogue avec les discours antèrieurs tenus sur le même object, ainsi qu'avec les discours à venir (...)". (p.81.) See also TODOROV, T. Human and Interhuman: Mikhail Bakhtin. In: _____. Literature and its Theorists: a Personal View of Twentieth Century Criticism. New York, Cornel University Press, 1987. p. 70-88.

[36]BAKHTIN, From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse, p.161

[37]BARTHES, R. Theory of the Text, In: YOUNG, R., ed. Untying the Text: A poststructuralist Reader. London: Routledge, 1981, p.39. For a similar notion of intertextuality see BARTHES, R. Le Plaisir du Texte. Paris, Seuil, 1973. p.58-9

[38]BARTHES, The Death of the Author. In: HEALTH, S., ed. Image- Music-Text. London, Fontana, 1977. p. 142-3.

[39]BARTHES, The Death of the Author, p.142.

[40]BARTHES, Theory of the Text, p.44.

2 THE FRAMEWORK OF ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD: STOPPARD'S VISION OF REALITY AS A SET OF INTERCHANGEABLE FRAMES.

I have an enormous need for framework. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead it was enormously liberating to work within a pre-ordained plot. It left time for all those more important details. (T. Stoppard)

In Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience, Erving GOFFMAN holds that our minds operate within pre-organized structures; in other words, frames of reference through which we perceive and organize experience.[1] Examining RG under the light of GOFFMAN's theory, a framing structure emerges as a possible pattern to account for RG's complex process of composition. In the same way as individuals are subjected to multiple frames with which they construct reality, so are Stoppard's characters subjected to literary frames which construct their theatrical universe. Thus, as frames exist and interrelate both in the real-life world and in the world of art, by playing with frames, Stoppard is able to make philosophical assertions about the nature of art as artifice and the nature of reality as a social construct, i.e., a set of interchangeable frames.

Several theorists have relied on the concept of framing[2] or nesting to provide an understanding contemporary of parody, among them Brian McHALE, who views it as a strategy which has "the effect of interrupting and complicating the ontological horizon of the fiction,

multiplying its worlds, and laying bare the process of world-construction".[3] For McHALE with each new frame, there occurs a change of world, that is a change of ontological level which can be either continuous or discontinuous with the ontological level of the main frame. Departing from McHALE's proposition, I will try to describe the framing technique of Stoppard's text as operating changes of universes, which end up by reflecting on the very nature of the 'real life' world.

The main frame of Stoppard's play is Hamlet. Basically, Stoppard's play turns it inside out: things that in Hamlet happen onstage, happen offstage in RG, and inversely, things that in Hamlet are supposedly happening offstage in RG are presented as the main action. The Player in RG is fully conscious of this procedure:

> PLAYER: We keep to our usual stuff, more or less, only inside out. We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else. (RG 21)

The parallel between Stoppard's play and reality is, thus, traced: in the same way that Hamlet can be turned inside out, that its action can be watched from the wings - from Ros and Guil's perspective, and from the Player's perspective -, our own world is also made of frames, each of which gives a different perspective to examine and judge a phenomenon. Nothing can be taken as an absolute truth, in either our world or in the world of RG, for everything exists inside frames; there is no 'unframed' state: "everything is framed"[4], either in life or in art.

Point of view and perspective become very much relevant in a world where things, people and events are subjected to frames. It is my hypothesis that in playing with the device of Chinese-boxes or nesting, Stoppard aims at interrogating the nature of the text and, by analogy, the nature of the world we live in. In rewriting Hamlet from the perspective of two minor and helpless characters, he offers us a new experience of Shakespeare's play: the great tragedy becomes distant, somewhat incomprehensible to contemporary eyes. The tragic events, detached from their cultural context, acquire an undertone of absurdity.

In this juxtaposing of several worlds, it is the plot of the matrix play - Hamlet - which is inserted in the supposedly 'larger' plot of RG. But nothing really happens in this 'larger' Stoppardian plot; it is, like Godot, essentially repetitive and built around situation rather than action. Stoppard's idea is to combine Hamlet's linear structure with Godot's emphasis on atmosphere, disregarding the latter's circular structure. In short, Stoppard deconstructs Shakespeare's play by transforming it into a kind of play-within-the-play within RG.

The borders of these frames -where RG begins and where Hamlet ends and vice-versa - are not closed because the two plays intermingle. The two universes - Shakespeare's Renaissance and Stoppard's twentieth century - constantly interact. The action of Stoppard's play is, in general terms, dictated by the action of Hamlet and Hamlet's action is modified and reinterpretated in the light of twentieth century problems and characters.

The framing technique employed by Stoppard is further complicated by the fact that Hamlet already contains a dumb-show and a play-within-the-play, namely The Murder of Gongazo. In Shakespeare, however, the boundaries between Hamlet and the play-within-the play are thoroughly respected, the two universes being able to keep their independence; as McHALE writes, "Hamlet, with its single interruption by the play-within-the-play is unproblematic in its ontological structure".[5]

In absorbing The Murder of Gongazo's dumb-show, Stoppard takes the opposite direction of Shakespeare; instead of keeping the two ontological universes separate, he chooses to make them overlap by expanding the dumb-show to the point that it envelops the very action of Hamlet, the play which originally contains it. Stoppard's version of the dumb-show is, in the beginning, faithful to Shakespeare's: the Players are rehearsing the play they are to present to the king that night. Stoppard then prolongues the dumb-show to incude the on and offstage events of Hamlet, such as the closet-scene, the king's decision to send Hamlet to England accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the boat-scene, the two lords' arrival in England and their sentence to death. These episodes are part of Stoppard's strategy of recreation: the action of Hamlet is turned into a dumb-show.

In David LODGE's[6] postmodern terminology, Stoppard **short-circuits** Hamlet and its dumb-show: the boundary between the text (Hamlet) and the text-within-the-text (the dumb-show) is trespassed; moreover, RG and the dumb-show are also short-circuited. Thus, the

ontological universes of Hamlet and the dumb-show, though carefully preserved in Shakespeare, are superimposed by Stoppard and further mixed within the universe of RG.

The framing structure of RG is even more complicated, for, besides Hamlet and the expanded and modified version of the dumb-show, Stoppard also includes rehearsals by the Players, which do not occur in Shakespeare, and sketches where Ros and Guil play Godotesque verbal games, which can also be considered as plays-within-the-play(s).

In analysing Travesties, one of Stoppard's major plays, Anna S. CAMATI concludes that in juxtaposing frames, Stoppard postulates the relativity of everything, showing how "all dichotomic relations are unstable and reversible, polarities that encompass rather than exclude one another."[7] CAMATI applies the Chinese-box structure to highlight the parodic framework of Travesties, where "form supersedes content and truth is not discovered by a process of knowing, but created by a process of making".[8] While in Travesties Stoppard deals with contemporary attitudes on arts, politics and society, in RG Stoppard remains largely within the domain of literature, theatre and dramatic theory. However, in both plays, Stoppard is concerned with form, language and style and holds a relativistic standpoint, which permits him to question the boundaries between illusion and reality.

The structure of RG is parodic as it concerns itself mostly with how to organize, mix and contrast materials - plots, themes, characters, language, dramatic devices -, that have already been

masterfully employed by other playwrights. RG, thus, turns around the very idea of its form, rather than what is traditionally called content. In this foregrounding of form, form becomes content: by making visible the process of world construction as it happens in the world(s) inside the play, Stoppard metaphorically dwells on the nature of the real life world.

Since the structure of RG is indeed complex, as I have pointed out above, I aim at elucidating it by following Stoppard's three act division, focusing on the back and forth movement of RG and its relations to its various frames act by act. In the subsequent pages, I will pursue a descriptive and sequential reading of the play in order to get a sense of its movement and of the various frames operating in it.[9] Because of the sequential nature of this chapter, some of the ideas outlined here will be resumed in more detail elsewhere.

The first act of RG opens with the two characters, dressed in Elizabethan costumes but employing twentieth century language, engaged in the game of coin spinning and in pseudo-philosophical enquiries about the law of probability, chance and free will, reality, illusion and death. This scene is not part of Shakespeare's text; in fact, it overtly recalls the opening scene of Beckett's Godot. In both plays the characters - Stoppard's Ros and Guil and Beckett's Didi and Gogo- cannot remember their past and, instead, play games to pass the time while waiting for something to happen. The audience is also locked in the expectancy of something to happen, of some kind of revelation about the characters' identities.

It is only when Guil remembers the king's summons - "There was a messenger ... that's right. We were sent for" (RG 12) - that they are placed as Shakespearean characters inside the Hamlet plot; up to then, their only link to Hamlet is their costumes and the expectancy of the audience created by the title of the play. In fact, the play's title works as a first frame operating in RG. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, which derives from a line of Hamlet (Ham V.ii.374), furnishes the audience, even before the play actually begins, with the knowledge that the two characters and their fate are Shakespearean.

As the curtain rises, the two supposedly 'dead' characters, Ros and Guil (who should be **dead** as the title announces), appear strangely alive; this shatters the status of the Shakespearean text and universe, putting into question the role of the audience and its previous knowlegde of Shakespeare's work.

The ontological ground presented at the opening of the play is, thus, neither purely twentieth century, nor solely Shakespearean. Stoppard's creation of Ros and Guil's life prior to their arrival in Elsinore, their contemporary and matter-of-fact language and behaviour greatly constrast with the Elizabethan costumes and the audience's expectation of encountering Shakesperean characters. Guil's allusion to Shakespeare's plot, quoted before, is echoed and re-echoed throughout the first act (RG 13, 14). Stoppard places special emphasis on this allusion because it constitutes both Ros and Guil's, as well as his own, departure point in re-enacting and re-writing Hamlet. It is Stoppard as a writer and a foreigner, foreign in being born Czech and

in being more than three hundred years removed from Shakespeare's universe, who brings back to the stage the 'sleeping' Ros and Guil:

> ROS: That's it - pale sky before dawn, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters - shouts - What's all the row about?! Clear off! - But then he called our names. You remember that - this man woke us up. (RG 14)

Stoppard projects himself inside the universe of his borrowed characters, using the mask of a royal messenger, thus making his own world as a writer and the world of his characters overlap. His predicament as a writer coincides with his characters' predicament: Ros and Guil exist as long as they are, at least partially, Shakespearean characters in the same way that Stoppard's text is possible as long as it is, at least partially, a rewriting of Shakespeare's Hamlet. In other words, the ontological level of the writer's world outside the text is projected onto the text: Stoppard's text depends on the awakening of Ros and Guil.

Surprisingly, Ros and Guil cannot recall anything prior to their 'awakening', which is meaningful at several levels: the literal waking up from sleep, the metatheatrical awakening provided by Stoppard's parody, the existential awakening into life. Stoppard is the foreigner who metatheatrically resurrects characters so that they can start their journey to Elsinore. Yet, throughout the play, this much is what they ever remember about their lives - that a foreigner woke them up - being forever placed on the margins of the action, never knowing what to do next or how to act.

Throughout Act I, allusions to the plot of Hamlet are subtle but meaningful. After the introductory coin-tossing game, Ros and Guil meet the Players, characters who also appear in Hamlet. This meeting adds a further dimension to their ontological status as Shakespearean characters. By meeting the Players, Ros and Guil become more assured of their existence (even though the Players' rehearsals will constantly place them as spectators rather than protagonists) in a universe where "un, sub, or *supernatural forces*" (RG 12) have been operating, and (pseudo-)scientific laws have been defied. Neither reason nor experience, neither philosophy nor psychology, neither pragmatism nor religiosity, neither logic nor fate or chance seem to furnish reliable explanations for the incredible run of heads, which challenges the very consistency of the characters' universe:

> GUIL: (...) List of possible explanations. One. I'm willing it. Inside where nothing shows, I am the essence of a man spinning double-headed coins, and betting against *himself* in private atonement for an unremembered past. *(He spins a coin at ROS)*
>
> ROS: Heads.
>
> GUIL: Two: time has stopped dead, and the single experience of one coin being spun once has been repeated ninety times ... *(He flips a coin, looks at it, tosses it to ROS).* On the whole, doubtful. Three: divine intervention, that is to say, a good turn from above concerning him, cf. children of Israel, or retribution from above concerning me, cf. Lot's wife. Four: a spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually *(he spins one)* is as likely to come down heads as tails and therefore should cause no surprise each individual time it does. *(It does. He tosses it to ROS)* (RG 11)

All answers are attempts at solving the mystery of reality; yet, no one answer alone provides a definite and ultimate truth. The line

between reality and illusion - the audience and the stage, real life and the theatre - constantly shifts in a universe of relativity, multiple perspectives, and changing truths. The unicorn speech illustrates and condenses the implied equation between reality and illusion:

> GUIL: A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population or significance, sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear. That in itself is startling, but there are precedents for mystical encounters of various kinds, or to be less extreme, a choice of persuasions to put it down to fancy; until - 'My God', says a second man, 'I must be dreaming, I thought I saw a unicorn'. At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, adds no further dimension but only spreads it thinner, and a fourth thinner still, and the more witnesses there are the thinner it gets and the more reasonable it becomes until it is as thin as reality, the name we give to the common experience ... ... 'Look, look!' recites the crowd. 'A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer'. (RG 15)

Reality becomes, in itself, unreliable, a vision partaken by the crowd; the 'reality' of reality is only asserted by the number of people who believe and share and see things in the same way; in other words, it is **consensus** that determines the real. Consensus implies that there is no absolute and ultimate truth; perspective not only determines the view of the world one possesses, but moreover, it creates the very subject - the very individual. Truth depends on point of view, but perspective determines the individual:

> GUIL: (...) A Chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty - and, by which definition, a philosopher - dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him; in his two-fold security. (RG 44)

The ultimate reality of the self - am I a Chinaman dreaming I am a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming I am a Chinaman? - is problematized along with the reality of the world. The self becomes the source of a perspective in which to view the events as well as the product of a construction. These points will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Up to the reversal scene where the coin turns up tails (RG 25), the ontological level which dominates is that of a twentieth century foreign writer, who awakens supposedly Shakespearean characters strangely acting as twentieth century actors, who have not learned their roles well. It is only after the coin comes down tails, after the incredible sequence of eighty-nine heads, that there occurs a more abrupt change of language and action, and consequently, of ontological ground: whole passages from Hamlet are then slightly modified and inserted in RG, while Stoppard makes his 'entrances' through Shakespeare's 'exits'.

There are many ways in which Shakespeare's text is incorporated in RG: through faithful transcriptions of whole sections which Stoppard defamiliarizes with the insertion of stage-directions; the enactment of scenes which in Hamlet are only reported; the translations of Hamlet scenes into silent performances which mainly occur offstage but which the audience has a glimpse of when the characters hurriedly cross the stage; and reductive summaries of the action of Hamlet, which are turned into verbal games of question and

answer. By exploring the above strategies, I intend to describe and analyse Stoppard's deconstructive and creative method of composition.

For example, Ophelia's report to Polonius of Hamlet's distracted state of mind is transformed into a dumb-show performed by Hamlet and Ophelia:

OPHELIA: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors - he comes before me.
POLONIUS: Mad for thy love?
OPHELIA: My lord I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.
POLONIUS: What said he?
OPHELIA: He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such persusal of my face
As a would draw it. Long stayed he so;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out-a-doors he went without their helps
And to the last bended their light on me.
(Ham 2.1.75-99)

And OPHELIA runs on in some alarm, holding up her skirts - followed by HAMLET. *(OPHELIA has been sewing and she holds the garment. They are both mute. HAMLET, with his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle, pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other .. and with a look so piteous, he takes her by the wrist and holds her hard, then he goes to the length of his arm, and with his other hand over his brow, falls to such perusal of her face as he would draw it ... At last, with a little shaking of his arm, and thrice his head waving up and down, he*

> *raises a sigh so piteous and profound that it does seem to shatter all his bulk and end his being. That done he lets her go, and with his head over his shoulder turned, he goes out backwards without taking his eyes off her ... she runs off in the opposite direction).* (RG 26)

The strategy of adding to extracts from Hamlet a few stage-directions in parenthesis, which emphasize Ros and Guil's bewilderment in their Shakespearean roles, thus giving the scene a comic twist, is also employed:

> CLAUDIUS: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz ... (*he raises a hand at GUIL while ROS bows - GUIL bows late and hurriedly)* ... and Guildenstern. (*He raises a hand at ROS while GUIL bows to him - ROS is still straightening up from his previous bow and half way up he bows down again. With his head down, he twists to look at GUIL, who is on the way up.)*
> Moreover that we did much long to see you,
> The need we have to use you did provoke
> Our hasty sending.
> (ROS and GUIL still adjusting their clothing for CLAUDIUS's presence)
> Something have you heard
> Of Hamlet's transformation, so call it,
> Sith nor th'exterior not the inward man
> Resembles that it was. What it should be,
> More than his father's death, that thus hath put him,
> So much from th'understanding of himself,
> I cannot dream of. (...) (RG 26-7)

When fairly faithful Hamlet scenes are absorbed in RG, there occur abrupt changes from twentieth century to Elizabethan language. This change of language happens whenever Ros and Guil enter the Shakespearean plot: every time there is a superimposition of the action of Hamlet in RG, the attendant lords surrender completly to their Shakespearean roles and language. As soon as the superimposition ends, however, Ros and Guil return to their twentieth century

metatheatrical language and to their self-conscious pose, limiting their use of Shakespearean language to parody.

Language, thus, serves to mark the limits of the frames: when Ros and Guil are characters in the Hamlet plot, they submit to it completly and do not possess self-consciousness. When, on the other hand, they step out of it, they employ twentieth century language and are able to parody their roles and speeches, acquiring the self-consciousness of Pirandello's characters. Thus, the ontological universe of Stoppard's play is multiple: the characters belong to the Renaissance, to the twentieth century and mostly to the stage, celebrating the theatre as theatre.

There is a particular sketch (RG 35-38) in which the tension of Shakespeare's, Beckett's and Stoppard's universes is most visible. When Ros and Guil play a Godot-like verbal game called "Play at questions" to pass the time, they deconstruct Hamlet through the parody of a series of its themes and images as well as its current interpretations: Hamlet's transformation, the political plot and the themes of ambition, adultery and incest. This scene constitutes a kind of 'performance-within-the-performance', that is, a sketch within the action of RG which short-circuits and deflates the ontological universe of Hamlet by turning it into a Beckettian-like game and by making a reductive summary of its plot:

> ROS *(starts up. Snaps fingers)*: Oh! You mean - you pretend to be him, and I ask you questions!
> GUIL *(dry)*: Very good.
> ROS: You had me confused.
> GUIL: I could see I had.

(...) (...) (...)

ROS: My honoured Lord!

GUIL: My dear Rosencrantz!

(Pause)

ROS: Am I pretending to be you, then?

GUIL: Certainly not. If you like. Shall we continue?

ROS: Question and answer.

GUIL: Right.

ROS: Right. My honoured Lord.

GUIL: My dear fellow!

ROS: How are you?

GUIL: Afflicted!

ROS: Really? In what way?

GUIL: Transformed.

ROS: Inside or out?

GUIL: Both.

(...) (...) (...)

ROS: Let me get it straight. Your father was king. You were his only son. Your father dies. You are of age. Your uncle becomes king.

GUIL: Yes.

ROS: Unorthodox.

GUIL: Undid me.

ROS: Undeniable. Where were you?

GUIL: In Germany.

ROS: Usurpation, then.

GUIL: He slipped in.

(...) (...) (...)

ROS *(lugubriously)*: His body was still warm.

GUIL: So was hers.

ROS: Extraordinary.

GUIL: Indecent.

(...) (...) (...)

GUIL: Incest to adultery.

ROS: Would you go so far?

GUIL: Never.

ROS: To sum up: your father, whom you love, dies, you are his heir, you come back to find that hardly was the corpse cold before his young brother popped on to his throne and into his sheets, thereby offending both legal and natural practice. Now why exactly are you behaving in this extraodinary manner? (RG 36-8)

Act I of RG ends with a second well-marked insertion of Hamlet (Ham 2.2.203-228), in which the Prince meets the two attendant lords. By strategically ending the act before the longer speeches by

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are uttered, Stoppard minimizes the possibility of viewing them as power instruments manipulated by Claudius and foregrounds, instead, the version of their being innocent victims of a destiny they do not control. They remain highly ambiguous characters, neither purely Shakespearean, nor purely Beckettian, not even purely Stoppardian, a fact confirmed by their inhabiting conflicting universes.

By manipulating the fictional universes he works with - mainly Hamlet, Godot and his own RG - Stoppard complicates the ontological horizon of his play: no one ontological level can be taken as ultimate, for all of them mirror and distort each other. What he finally achieves is the creation of a multi-levelled world - sometimes Elizabethan, sometimes twentieth century, sometimes hybrid, but always theatrical - inhabited by equally hybrid characters.

The second act of RG does not pick the action from where Act I has left: the first act ends with line 228 (Ham 2.2), where Hamlet greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who have just arrived at Elsinore, while Act II starts with line 370 (Ham 2.2), the final part of the same dialogue where Hamlet reinforces his welcome to Ros and Guil. The core of the Shakespearean dialogue has been deleted: Hamlet's image of Denmark as a prison, his testing of Ros and Guil's purpose in visiting him, and the famous speech on the nature of man starting "What a piece of work is a man"(Ham 2.2.286). By choosing not to quote these passages, Stoppard misleads the audience's expectation to hear the famous speeches and avoids furnishing Ros and Guil with a

more round characterization, asserting the place of the author as a great manipulator who assembles a tissue of quotations drawn from several texts.

The opening lines of Act II are very short: a brief extract from Hamlet(2.2.370-396) which is, however, retold and commented upon by Ros and Guil for, as they lack a plot of their own, they mainly survive on the remnants of Shakespeare's plot. In spite of deleting important dialogues, Stoppard is able to partly account for them in the form of parody as these are translated into verbal games in which Ros and Guil interpret and summarize their encounter with Hamlet:

> ROS *(derisively)*: 'Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways.!' He was scoring off us all down the line.
> GUIL: He caught us on the wrong foot once or twice, perhaps, but I thought we gained some ground.
> ROS *(simply)*: He murdered us.
> GUIL: He might have had the edge.
> ROS *(roused)*: Twenty-seven – three, and you think he might have had the edge?! He murdered us. (RG 41)

Roughly speaking, during the second act of RG, there is a maximum interplay of Shakespeare's and Stoppard's texts, consisting of many extracts from Hamlet[10], apart from allusions, borrowed themes, parody of language, the enactment and distortion of the dumb-show as well as more frequent references to Godot. The presence of Hamlet in this act can be figuratively pictured as a text explosion, scattering extracts, allusions, devices and parodies randomly. Stoppard purposively makes it difficult for the audience to distinguish between what is Shakespearean and what is uniquely Stoppardian. The

boundaries between the ontological universes of the outer and the inner plays - RG and Hamlet - are hardly distinguishable; what is highlighted is the text and the role of the author as a great amalgamator.

A remarkable moment in terms of text explosion is the action of Hamlet taking place concomittantly with the rehearsal of the dumb-show. Part of the plot of Hamlet is enacted, and the other part is transformed into stage-directions. The Hamlet extracts are not, however, totally faithful to Shakespeare, for the characters take into account the Players's rehearsal of the dumb-show, which does not occur in Hamlet. Both the Shakespearean and the Stoppardian texts modify the audience's reception of one another. All the while, the Player functions as chorus, explaining the dumb-show to Ros and Guil:

> GUIL: What's the dumbshow for?
> PLAYER: Well, it's a device, really - it makes the action that follows more or less comprehensible; you understand, we are tied down to a language which makes up in obscurity what it lacks in style. *(The mime (continued) - enter another. He takes off the SLEEPER's crown, kisses it. He had brought in a small bottle of liquid. He pours the poison in the SLEEPER's ear, and leaves him. The SLEEPER convulses heroically, dying.)*
> ROS: Who was that?
> PLAYER: The king's brother and uncle to the Prince.
> GUIL: Not exactly fraternal.
> PLAYER: Not exactly avuncular, as time goes on.
> *(The QUEEN returns, makes passionate action, finding the KING dead. The POISONER comes in again, attended by two others (the two in cloaks). The POISONER seems to console with her. The dead body is carried away. The POISONER woos the QUEEN with gifts. She seems harsh awhile but in the end accepts his love. End of mime, at which point, the wail of a woman in torment and OPHELIA appears, wailing, closely followed by HAMLET in a hysterical state, shouting at her, circling her, both midstage).*

HAMLET: Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad! *(She falls on her knees weeping.).* I say we will have no more marriage! *(His voice drops to include the TRAGEDIANS, who have frozen).* Those that are married already (he leans close to the PLAYER-QUEEN and POISONER, speaking with quiet edge) all but one shall live. *(He smiles briefly at them without mirth, and starts to back out, his parting shot rising again).* The rest shall keep as they are. *(As he leaves, OPHELIA tottering upstage, he speaks into her ear a quick clipped sentence)* To a nunnery, go. *(He goes out. OPHELIA falls on her knees upstage, her sobs barely audible. A slight silence.)* (RG 57-8)

The audience experiences the unfolding of three actions: the Hamlet plot, the Players's rehearsal, and Ros and Guil's conversation with the Player. The result is a kind of mirror effect of the real audience in the theatre: they watch Ros, Guil and the Player watching a rehearsal of the tragedians, who watch the unfolding of the Shakesperean scene between Ophelia and Hamlet, who in their turn take notice of the Players' rehearsal. In this hall of mirrors, Stoppard rephrases the Elizabethan equation of the world as stage by multiplying the role of the audience and by questioning its place in the theatre. As the scene proceeds, Hamlet leaves the stage and the Players resume their rehearsal. But, once more, they are interrupted by the action of Hamlet:

PLAYER-KING: Full thirty times hath Phoebus's cart (*CLAUDIUS enters with POLONIUS and goes over to OPHELIA and lifts her to her feet. The TRAGEDIANS jump back with heads inclined.)*

CLAUDIUS: Love? His affections do not that way tend,
Or what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
o'er which his melancholy sits on brood, and I do doubt the hatch and the disclose will be some danger; which for to prevent I have in quick determination thus set it down: he shall with speed to England ... (...) (RG 58-9)

Each time an extract from Hamlet is inserted, the Stoppardian script gives way to Shakespeare's text, paying homage to it. In the above example, the rehearsal scene is only resumed after the characters of Hamlet leave the stage. Stoppard expands the Players' rehearsal, so as to include the future events of Hamlet, foreshadowing its action: the closet scene, the boat trip and the arrival in England, and Ros and Guil's death sentence, the last two having been only reported by Shakespeare.

The closet-scene, which in Hamlet occupies Act 4, Scene 4, becomes a mime in RG; the Player acts as chorus, serving as interpreter between Ros and Guil (the onstage audience), in a clear parody of Hamlet's attitude in Shakespeare's play, when the Prince, excited by the spectacle and the prospect of unmasking Claudius, also comments on the action:

> PLAYER: Lucianus, nephew to the king ... usurped by his uncle and shattered by his mother's incestuous marriage ... loses his reason ...throwing the court into turmoil and disarray as he alternates between bitter melancholy and unrestricted lunacy ... staggering from the suicidal *(a pose)* to the homicidal *(here he kills "POLONIUS")* .... he at last confronts his mother and in a scene of provocative ambiguity - (a somewhat oedipal embrace) begs her to repent and recant __ (RG 61)

> HAMLET: The Mousetrap. Marry how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what o' that? Your majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade winch, our withers are unwrung.
>
> (E*nter LUCIANUS)*
>
> This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.
>
> OPHELIA: You are as good as a chorus my lord.
>
> (...) (...) (...)

> HAMLET: A poisons him i'th'garden for's estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife. (Ham 3.2.216-239)

From the mime of the closet scene, the dumb-show proceeds to the mime of the King's decision to send Hamlet to England, as well as to the boat-scene and to the arrival in England where the two spies present a letter to the English king and are sentenced to death. This 'prolongued' dumb-show, encompassing a large section of the events in Hamlet, even though these occur mainly off-stage, such as the boat scene and the arrival in England, constitutes Stoppard's reductive summary of what probably happened outside Elsinore. It is his way of inserting "a dozen or sixteen lines" (Ham 2.2.543) in the original Shakespearean script. His strategy is to invert the original function of the play-within-the-play in Hamlet: rather than mirroring past events which illuminate the present, it mirrors future events which fail to illuminate the present. As the dumb-show offers a mirror to the future, Ros and Guil's lack of perception is emphasized, which is reinforced by the fact that the actor-spies wear identical coats to theirs, thus alluding to the common knowledge that most of the time human beings, even if they are forewarned, fail to make the right connections :

> *The whole mime has been fluid and continuou but now ROS moves forward and brings it to a pause. What brings ROS forward is the fact that under their cloaks the two SPIES are wearing identical coats to those worn by ROS and GUIL, whose coats are now covered by their cloaks. ROS approaches 'his' SPY doubtfully. He does not quite understand why the coats are familiar. ROS stands close, touches the coat thoughtfully...) (RG 62)*

The function of the play-within-the-play is, by this means, deconstructed: while in Hamlet it served to catch the conscience of the king - thus prompting Hamlet to take action -, in RG the dumb-show discloses the future that Ros and Guil fail to perceive, asserting once more the characters' blindness and their inactivity.

Another deconstructive strategy is used when Stoppard shows Ros and Guil's reaction, absent in Shakespeare's text, in the face of the death of Polonius. The pattern of behaviour Ros and Guil follow, indicated by the stage directions, is modelled after the Beckettian vaudeville:

> *(HAMLET enters opposite, slowly, dragging POLONIUS's BODY. He enters upstage, makes a small arc and leaves by the same side, a few feet downstage.) (ROS and GUIL, holding their belts taut, stare at him in some bewilderment). (HAMLET leaves, dragging the BODY. They relax the strain on the belts.) (RG 67-8)*

Stoppard adds more comicity to Ros and Guil when he includes stage-directions in otherwise faithful transcriptions of Hamlet, as the extract below shows:

> ROS: My Lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.
> HAMLET: The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing ...
> GUIL: A thing, my lord __?
> HAMLET: Of nothing. Bring me to him.
> *(HAMLET moves resolutely towards one wing. They move with him, shepherding. Just before they reach the exit, HAMLET, apparently seeing CLAUDIUS approaching from off stage, bends low in a sweeping bow. ROS and GUIL, cued by HAMLET, also bow deeply - a sweeping ceremonial bow with their cloaks swept round them. HAMLET, however, continues the movement into an about-turn and walks off in*

> *the opposite direction. ROS and GUIL, with their heads low, do not notice. No one comes on. ROS and GUIL squint upwards and find that they are bowing to nothing. (...)* (RG 69)

By intermingling scenes from Hamlet and clownish behaviour on the part of Ros and Guil, Stoppard turns his characters into an on-stage audience. For instance, when the King, who briefly enters the stage, commands Ros and Guil to bring Hamlet to his presence, they remain perplexed and watch in bewilderment Hamlet cross and leave the stage. The idea is that the interview between Claudius and Hamlet will occur offstage, while Ros and Guil will be left onstage, and once more, to their own resources. Again, the blankness of their lives and of Stoppard's text without the action of Hamlet emerges as Guil says, "We have contributed nothing." (RG 70). Like characters from Godot, they talk about the weather, their long waiting, the passing of time, and death:

> ROS: They'll have us hanging about till we're dead. At least. And the weather will change. *(Looks up.)* The spring can't last forever. (...) (...) (...)
> ROS: We'll be cold. The summer won't last.
> GUIL: It's autumnal.
> ROS *(examining the ground)*: No leaves. (RG 71)

Between these Godot-like preoccupations with time and the unfolding action of Hamlet, Ros and Guil barely manage to sustain the play's action. The fact that they reveal their knowledge of having to escort Hamlet to England, "We're taking him to England" (RG 70), something the audience does not see Claudius communicating to them, indicates

Stoppard's free appropriation and taking for granted the action of Hamlet.

Act II ends with two more insertions of Shakespearean extracts in Stoppard's text: namely a conversation between Hamlet and the soldier and between Hamlet and Ros (RG 71), and a final short exchange of words between Ros and Guil. Here, the need for suspense as a device used in the theatre is obliquely suggested:

> ROS: We've come this far.
> (*He moves towards exit. GUIL follows him.*)
> And besides, anything could happen yet.
> (*They go.*) (RG 72)

In sum, as in Act I, the second act also works with the multiplication and confrontation of universes - Shakespeare's, Beckett's and Stoppard's. Ultimately, it is the supremacy of the ontological level of the stage which is asserted.

Act III is basically the enactment of a short scene of Hamlet (Ham 4.5), where Horatio receives a letter from the Prince. Strangely enough, this act is the most Stoppardian, as the playwright exercises great freedom of composition in re-writing events which occurred on the boat and were only narrated by Hamlet in the letter:

> HORATIO [*reads*]: Horatio,when thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the King: they have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very war-like appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour; in the grapple I boarded them: on the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did; and I am to do a good turn to them.

> Let the king have the letters I have sent; and repair thou to me with as much haste as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb, yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England: of them I have much to tell thee. Farewell.He that thou knowest thine,
>
> Hamlet.
> (Ham 4.6.11-25)

The above events are expanded and gain the reality of the stage, occupying the whole of the third act of RG. In a few words, the plot is as follows: Ros and Guil are on their course to England, engaged in their peculiar philosophical conversation; Hamlet, who is also on the boat, exchanges Claudius's letter to the King of England while Ros and Guil are asleep; the pirates attack and Hamlet disappears; unexpectedly, the Players emerge from barrels; Guil 'kills' the Player with a fake knife; the Players enact the death of the Queen, Laertes, the King, Hamlet and the two spies; Ros and Guil are left alone and the light fades out; after that, the stage is lit again and the place where the Players enacted the death of the Shakespearean characters is now occupied by these very characters, all dead; Horatio and the ambassadors deliver their final speeches.

The issue of the freedom of the characters, and their dependence on the plot of Hamlet, is dramatized by the fact that they are on a boat. The audience is led to expect a total reversal of Ros and Guil's situation, since the two attendant lords have a chance to get hold of and read their own death sentence in the letter that Hamlet had written and exchanged for the original one. This incident suggests that

they could free themselves from their Shakespearean fate and survive the boat episode. Nevertheless, at the very end of this act, these hopes are frustrated and all the foreshadowings of their coming death are fulfilled. The play ends with the final scene of the Hamlet plot taking over Stoppard's play.

At this point, then, a reversal of the frame scheme occurs; Hamlet, which worked as the play-within-the-play in the first two acts, now becomes the outer play engulfing Stoppard's play which becomes the play-within-the-play. RG, thus, surrenders to Hamlet, both plays ending with the same speeches. It is in this sense, then, that Stoppard's frames are fluid and reversible. In other words, what was just background action becomes the main focus and vice-versa, RG submerging into Hamlet; thus, the morality and validity of Shakespeare's tragic universe is affirmed by Stoppard who, through his choice of ending, revalidates the aesthetic power of tragedy as a valid way of ordering and accounting for experience.

In sum, the framing structure of RG mirrors the ambiguity of the situation the characters face: simultaneously characters participating in two plays and in two distinct universes, without ever knowing how to 'act' how to behave, what to do next. The many frames which encompass their existence shape the kind of response - the language and attitude - they have towards each situation. While subjected to a Stoppardian twentieth century environment, they spend their time gambling and risking a number of philosophical considerations. Within the frame of Hamlet, they only say what is

marked for them, never venturing a question or a speech that is not 'written'. In their verbal games, specifically 'play at questions', they are only allowed to ask questions but never receive satisfactory answers. In relation to the dumb-show, they act as mere spectators, without ever being quite enlightened.

Thus, Ros and Guil's attitudes are slightly modified according to the frames they are operating within. They are entrapped in these frames, without the possibility of ever breaking free from them, for these very frames give them existence. In RG Stoppard provides a visual metaphor for frames by comparing them with wheels:

> GUIL: Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are ... condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one - that is the meaning of order. (...) (RG 44)

Frames are, thus, likened to wheels: metatheatrically, they represent the pre-determination of Shakespeare's well-established text; existentially, they represent destiny and/or power structures. Against these forces, Ros and Guil cannot fight:

> GUIL: (...) we are little men, we don't know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etcetera - it would be presumptous of us to interfere with the designs of fate or even of kings. (...) (RG 83)

The form of RG - the set of interchangeable frames- mimetically reproduces our twentieth century experience of reality. In the same way that Ros and Guil are in and out scripts, having to adapt their language and behaviour to external situations which are imposed upon

them and which give them existence and identity, twentieth century men also experience reality as a multiplicity of frames which shape and pre-determine their identitites and lives. The plurality men face in their everyday life, the several sub-universes they participate in - work, family, religion, social class, ethnic group, mass-media - function as frames to which they must quickly adapt to.

Like twentieth century men, the characters of RG shift from one universe to another, from Shakespearean to twentieth century language, from being Rosencrantz and Guildenstern or simply Ros and Guil. Stoppard's characters embody the predicament of twentieth century individuals: subjected to powers and controls they ignore, they walk blindlessly towards uncertainty and death.

NOTES:

[1]GOFFMAN, E. Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974. p. 10-11.

[2]As listed in Jerome HAWTHORN's glossary A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory. London, Edward Arnold, 1992. p. 68-71), other authors have employed the concept of **framing** for analysing literature, such as McHALE, B. Postmodern Fiction. London, Methuen, 1987; CAWS, M.A. Reading Frames in Modern Fiction. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985; BAL, T. Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. London, University of Toronto Press, 1985; CULLER, J. Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions. Oxford, Blackwell, 1988; ECO, U. The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. London, Hutchinson, 1981.

[3]McHALE, p.112

[4]WAUGH, P. Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction. London, Methuen, 1987. p. 28.

[5]McHALE, p. 113

[6]LODGE defines the term 'short-circuit' as a device which, by assuming a gap between the text and the world, i.e., art and life, combines facticity and fictionality and exposes the conventions as they are being used. See LODGE, D. The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Tipology of Modern Literature. London, Edward Arnold, 1977. p. 239-240.

[7]CAMATI, A.S. The Serio-Comic Theatre of Tom Stoppard: Parodic Theatricality in *Travesties.* Doctorship thesis - University of São Paulo, 1987. p.vi

[8] CAMATI, p.vi

[9]See the interpretation of the structure of RG by Helène KEYSSAR-FRANKE in The Strategy of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Education Theatre Journal, 27, (1):85-97, May 1975, and that of GRUBER in Wheels within Wheels, etcetera: Artistic Design in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Comparative Drama 15, (4) : 291-310, Winter 1981-82 which also briefly hint at the interplay between Stoppard and Shakespeare.

[10]The scheme below facilitates the visualization of how and which extracts Stoppard borrows from Hamlet and intermingles in his play:

ACT I RG:

- extract from Ham 2.1.203-228 corresponding to RG 26-28.
- extract from Ham 2.2.199-217 corresponding to RG 38-39, where Hamlet talks to Polonius and greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

ACT II RG:

- extract from Ham 2.2. 337- 360 corresponding to RG 40, which is the continuation of the previous extract where Hamlet welcomes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
- extract from Ham 2.2. 489-500, where Polonius leads the Players to meet Hamlet and the latter dispatches Ros and Guil from his presence.
- extract from Ham 3.1. 10-31, corresponding to RG 56, where Ros and Guil are interrogated by the Queen and King, and where Polonius brings the news that a play will be performed that night.
- brief extract from Ham 3.1. 89-91, where Hamlet greets Ophelia.
- approximately from Ham 3.1. 140-143 and Ham 3.1. 156-164, which correspond to RG 58-59. While the Players are rehearsing the dumb-show for Ros and Guil, Ophelia and Hamlet cross the stage, running and shouting, in a recreation of the end of the nunnery scene in Hamlet. Claudius and Polonius enter and take Ophelia away from the stage; the Players freeze, watching the action of Hamlet unfold.
- Ham 4.1. 32-40, which corresponds to RG 65, another brief extract where Claudius calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and instructs them to search for Hamlet who has just slain Polonius.
- Ham 4.2. 4-15, which corresponds to RG 68-70, where Ros and Guil ask Hamlet where Polonius's body is.
- a brief extract from Ham 4.3.9-14, corresponding to RG 70, where Hamlet talks to a soldier.
- the continuation of the previous extract, Ham 4.4. 28-31, RG 71, where Hamlet thanks the soldier and Ros goes to fetch the Prince.

ACT III RG:

- Ham 5.2. 347-354, corresponding to RG 96, where the ambassadors from England arrive, announcing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been executed; Horatio comments upon the news.

3 TWO PRUFROCKEAN SHAKESPEARE CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF GODOT

> *What these two persons are and do is impossible to represent by one. These soft approaches, this smirking and bowing, this assenting, wheedling, flattering, this whisking agility, this wagging of tail, - how can they be expressed by a single man? (Goethe)*

Originality, in the traditional sense, is not part of Stoppard's character creation. As he himself admits, "What I like is to take a stereotype and betray it, rather than to create an original character. I never try to invent characters. All my best characters are clichés."[1] In an interview with N. S. HARDIN, he clearly asserts that his main preoccupation in writing his plays is not to draw characters that are modelled after some individual personality as found in real life, but rather to use them as a means for conveying ideas:

> I suppose some plays start with the desire to write about a certain kind of person; then, you have something to go on. But I tend to start with something more abstract: I tend to write about ideas, and then come the individuals.[2]

Stoppard breaks away from the traditional ideas of realistic drama, which maintains that characters must be consistent and possess marked identities. He selects, from the enormous amount of existing dramatic stereotypes, two minor Shakespearean characters, who have constantly been overlooked in film and theatrical productions, and elevates them as main characters of his play. He

names them Ros and Guil, diminutive forms for the long and pompous Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Yet, by including the Shakespearean names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the title of his play, he does not let the audience lose sight of their noble origin: they are characters from the tragedy of Hamlet, little men swept into great events.

In RG, Ros and Guil act as if they were trapped in a plot which does not concern them directly. Here and there, the Shakespearean action takes over. At these moments, Ros and Guil become mere spectators of a plot they cannot control, entertaining the audience and improvising as best as they can: they are characters without direction, picked up by an author, who apparently forgot them afterwards. Maybe here lies Stoppard's riddle: spectators or characters, audience or actors, Shakespearean or Beckettian, who are these people that we see on stage?

Critics have tended to consider Guil as emotional, poetic and intelligent, and Ros as practical, prosaic and stupid. Yet, these characteristics do not serve to define them, for as I mentioned above, Stoppard's character construction reverses the concepts of realistic drama and does not aim at mimetically representing real people. Proof of this is the fact that, while in Act I, Guil is the one who philosophizes, in Act II, it is Ros who does all the questioning. The fluidity and reversibility of Ros and Guil is asserted by Stoppard himself: "Quite a lot of my lines could be given to different people in the play without anything odd."[3]

Critics have attempted at equating Ros to Beckett's more materialistic Gogo, and Guil to the more spiritual Didi[4]; Guil's caring attitude towards Ros has been compared to Gogo's protective role. However, this equation is also easily dismantled, for if indeed Guil looks after Ros in the first act, in Act II it is Ros who takes care of Guil. Thus, so far, the attempts at finding a pattern of characterization for Ros and Guil have not, in my view, held ground.

In abandoning the characterization of realistic drama, and opting for characters who play games, wear masks and are conscious of their role-playing, Stoppard approaches the twentieth century conception of individuality, which emphasizes the performance of roles. According to Patricia WAUGH, the stress on roles invites one to employ the study of characters in novels as "a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels".[5] The similarity between the playing of a role and the self becomes more apparent in the dramatic characters, as these are already constructed upon the clear and visible duplicity between characters and actors: in order to exist, a dramatic character has to be impersonated by a real flesh and blood actor, while the characters of a novel only exist on paper. Thus, Ros and Guil, who are easily in and out of plots, who act both as audience and as characters, resemble our selves in real life and our multiple everyday roles and masks, embodying the twentieth century subjectivity which emphasizes self-conscious playing of roles.

In 1896, Oscar WILDE remarked that there is "nothing in all drama more incomparable from the point of view of art, nothing more

suggestive in its subtlety of observation, than Shakespeare's drawing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern."[6] WILDE calls attention to the immense gap existing between Hamlet - the dreamer, the poet, the artist who is called to perform a real action of tragic dimensions - and the two attendant lords who realize nothing:

> Of all this (Hamlet's tragic conflict) Guildenstern and Rosencrantz realise nothing. They bow and smirk and smile, and what the one says the other echoes with sickliest intonation. (...) They are close to his (Hamlet's) very secret and know nothing of it. Nor would there be any use in telling them. They are the little cups that can hold so much and no more. Towards the close it is suggested that, caught in a cunning spring set for another, they have met, or may meet, with a violent and sudden death. But a tragic ending of this kind (...) is really not for such as they. They never die. (...) They are types fixed for all time. (...) They are merely out of their sphere - that is all. In sublimity of soul there is no contagion. High thoughts and high emotions are by their very existence isolated.[7]

Wilde's description, which re-echoes Goethe's, strangely fits the characters' 20th century redesign by Stoppard. The twentieth century dramatist thoroughly explores the implications of their 'realizing nothing', of their 'bowing and smirking and smiling', and of their echoing and re-echoing each other; moreover, he explores the idea of their being 'caught in a cunning spring' set for Hamlet and of being 'out of their sphere'. As WILDE states, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are types fixed forever and, thus, they never die. Stoppard also makes a point of their never dying, since he conceives their death as a failing to reappear, a point that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

However, while Wilde stresses their limitation by means of the cup comparison, Stoppard overloads 'these little cups' with a series of intertextualities so as to make them transcend their identities as Shakespearean characters and become a mirror for the contemporary individual. Basically, Stoppard contrasts the great hero of Shakespearean tragedy - Hamlet - with the anti-heroes of twentieth century literature, best represented in Eliot, Pirandello, and Beckett, as I will show in the first three sections of this chapter. Since his characters are the repository of ideas, Stoppard is free to overload their 'personalities' with echoes from these and other writers. The final product is what Umberto ECO has identified as a character possessing **transworld identity**: entities who cross back and forth different worlds, changing their own ontological status as they migrate in and out of these universes[8]; these ideas will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

3.1. ELIOT'S INFLUENCE: A HUNDRED INDECISIONS BEFORE DYING

I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker
And in short, I was afraid.
(T.S. Eliot)

T. S. Eliot's work has served as intertext to many of the ideas developed in RG. Stoppard admits this debt in an interview:

> (...) there are certain things written in English which make me feel as a diabetic must feel when the insulin goes in. Prufrock and Beckett are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system (...)[9]

In fact, the germ for RG is to be found in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"[10], as the poem contains the suggestion of approaching the plot of Hamlet from the point of view of an attendant lord:

> No! I'm not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
> Am an attendant lord, one that will do
> To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
> At times, indeed, almost ridiculous-
> Almost at times the Fool .

Though the implications in the poem may be taken as referring both to Polonius or to Ros or Guil - for Polonius is the one who is full of high sentence -, what is important is to keep the contrast Eliot establishes between the tragic hero and the twentieth century man. In our time, the tragic hero is not anymore someone of the stature of Hamlet, the Elizabethan hero who faces isolation, indecision and doubt before fulfilling the fate of the avenger. In our century, Hamlet becomes Prufrock, afraid of disturbing the universe, of formulating questions, afraid of sex, women, tied up to his everyday routines of tea-parties, small talk and cakes. The great soliloquies and speeches in which Hamlet philosophizes about human nature, death, suidide, tragic fate, the nature and power of the theatre are substituted by Prufrock's

fear of formulating questions and his endless 'visions and revisions before the taking of a toast and tea'. It becomes evident that the average contemporary man resembles much more Prufrock than Hamlet.

The hypothesis that "Prufrock" is a possible source for the conception of RG is reinforced by the fact that Stoppard paraphrases many of its lines. For instance, when Ros and Guil are playing at questions, Ros does not understand the rules of the game and continually re-echoes Prufrock by asking: "How should I begin?" (RG 35). Ros's difficulty and puzzlement in playing a simple game is indicative of his Prufrockean bewilderment about life: Ros and Guil do not know who they are, as they have been thrown into roles they ignore, thus feeling detached from their plot as Prufrock does in the tea-rooms, overhearing women coming and going, eating cakes and 'talking of Michelangelo'.

The Prufrockean formula - "Do I dare? Do I dare?", "Do I dare disturb the universe?" - also marks Ros and Guil's characters. Like Prufrock, they hesitate, not daring to disturb the universe of Hamlet, not daring to step out of their Shakespearean roles. It is their Prufrockean indecision, their inability to take action and their bewilderment in life which seals their destinies.

Ros and Guil's double roles as Shakespearean characters and twentieth century non-entities resemble the predicament of Eliot's hero. Prufrock needs 'time to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet', experiencing the disparity between real self and social mask.

Ros and Guil must also continually change their language and attitude in order to fit in the Shakespearean script: "Give us this day our daily mask", prays Guil (RG 30). Existentially speaking, Ros and Guil's bafflement and their need for a mask is similar to that of Prufrock: they are unsure of their selves and their places in the world.

Eliot portrays Prufrock's inability to face life and death: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttilng across the floors of silent seas". In a similar way, Stoppard's characters also affirm their inability to deal with life and, by taking no action, they opt for their silent death. The ordinariness and worthlessness of Prufrock's life, evident in the line "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" is also partaken by Stoppard's anti-heroes.

In sum, Ros and Guil's bafflement in face of a puzzling and disturbing world, their inability to take action, their ordinary life even if placed in an extraordinary situation, their blankness, feeling of vertigo and their obssession with death are common themes shared by both Eliot's poem and RG. "Prufrock" functions as an archetypal frame for the portrayal of twentieth century man: an anti-hero unsure of his place in the world, afraid of taking action and of questioning life, self-conscious of his unimportance and full of fears, doubts and silences.

3.2. PIRANDELLO'S INFLUENCE: TWO CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF THEMSELVES

Masks, masks - a puff and they are gone, to give way to other masks. (Pirandello)

In an interview with Giles GORDON, Stoppard admits the legacy of Pirandello to contemporary theatre as a whole.[11] In fact, Stoppard incorporates in his play part of the problematic raised by Pirandello - the autonomy of the characters, the place of the author, the role of the audience, the dichotomy of reality versus illusion and the status of art.

In Six Characters in Search of an Author[12], Pirandello creates characters who are not the product of an author; rather, they exist on their own and are strangely searching for 'their' author. This leads to the re-examination of the very role and place of the author, as the following speech suggests:

> THE FATHER: (...) When a character is born, he acquires at once such an independence, even of his own author, that he can be imagined by everybody even in many other situations where the author never dreamed of placing him; and so he acquires for himself a meaning which the author never thought of giving him. (SC 268)

As the 'six characters'[13] lack an author, they become the embodiment of illusion and fiction in its ultimate sense, their reality as characters being their sole ontological ground:

THE FATHER: As I say, sir, that which is a game of art for you is our sole reality. But not only for us,you know, by the way. Just you think it over well. Can you tell me who you are? (SC 264)

Their peculiar existence indirectly questions the reality of the Manager and the Actors of the company. From the point of view of the personages of the Actors, the existence of the 'six characters' is puzzling and leads them to question their own identities: might they not be, like the 'six characters', just characters rather than actors who impersonate characters? By extension, the existence of the real-theatre audience is also questioned.

Pirandello's implicit suggestion is that appearance might have a higher ontological level than reality itself, for the 'six characters' know who they are while the personages of the Actors and of the Manager do not, thus, operating an inversion of values: in this universe, it is not anymore art that imitates life; rather, it is life which needs to adapt to art. The supremacy of the reality of a character's life over a person's life is clearly asserted. While real people in real life are subjected to time and change, which gives them a sense of unreality, of being utterly mutable, the 'six characters' possess a permanent and unalterable reality:

THE FATHER: A character, sir, may always ask a man who he is. Because a character has really a life of his own, marked with his especial characteristics; for which reason he is always 'somebody'. But a man - I'm not speaking of you now - may very well be 'nobody'.

THE MANAGER: Yes, but you are asking these questions of me, the boss, the manager! Do you understand?

> THE FATHER: But only in order to know if you, as you really are now, see yourself as you once were with all the illusions that were yours then, with all the things both inside and outside of you as they seemed to you - as they were then indeed for you. Well, sir, if you think of all those illusions that mean nothing to you now, of all those things which don't even seem to you to exist any more, while once they were for you, don't you feel that - I won't say these boards - but the very earth under your feet is sinking away from you when you reflect that in the same way this you as you feel it today - all this present reality of yours - is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow? (SC 265)

The reality of characters surpasses our everyday sense of reality: art's reality is much more 'real' than our reality, because it is previously defined, already written down and has already conquered time. Our reality, however, is always in the process of becoming, always mutable, subjected to unknown forces, be they called chance, fate, providence or even free will.

By furnishing the 'six characters' with a metatheatrical existence, Pirandello juggles with the equation of appearance and reality, establishing different degrees of illusion. Likewise, the device of the play-within-the-play shatters the position, importance and uniqueness of the very play which contains it: is Six Characters a play about actors rehearsing a play, or about characters living their lives? What kind of reality prevails - that of the actors or that of the characters without an author? Are the two universes - the actors' and the characters' - compatible? What role does the author play in the clash between these two universes, these two perspectives, these two 'truths'?

The conflicting ontological universes presented on the stage extend into the audience, as I have already suggested above. The well-behaved audience, safely sitting and supposedly enjoying a play, protected by the fourth wall, is challenged to reflect upon its very role and place. By making the personages of the Actors function as on-stage audience to the personages of the Characters, Pirandello promotes the identification of the theatre-sitting audience and the actors; issues such as the role of the audience, the role of the actors and their relation to the characters and the role of the authors are raised. The theatre is turned into a hall of mirrors, where the audience sees itself as characters, actors and audience. Pirandello's theatre, thus, becomes self-reflective and also a place for self-reflection on the part of authors, directors, actors and audience.

In exploring the boundaries between illusion and reality and the self and the mask, in juxtaposing theatre and life, Pirandello reaches the reality of the theatre - which is ultimately an illusion- and the illusion of reality, where acting becomes the only possible truth.

In RG, Stoppard incorporates the Pirandellian problematic by working with already well-established characters and by extending their existence outside their original Shakespearean roles. By making his characters suffer from a strange amnesia, Stoppard destroys their very integrity as characters: Ros and Guil do not remember who they are and what they are supposed to do; they have no director to guide them. Imprisoned in their own existences, prey to identities and destinies which they did not choose and above all, which they ignore,

they become characters in search of themselves and in search of their roles as well as spectators of their own lives. They become the realization of Pirandello's impossibility of changing the destiny of characters, well expressed in Six Characters:

> THE FATHER: No, sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality which should make you shudder when you approach us if you are really conscious of the fact that your reality is a mere transitory and fleeting illusion, taking this form today and that tomorrow, according to the conditions, according to your will, your sentiments, which in turn are controlled by an intellect that shows them to you today in one manner and tomorrow ... who knows how?... Illusions of reality represented in this fatuous comedy of life that never ends, nor can ever end! Because if tomorrow it were to end ... then why, all would be finished. (SC 266)

Because Ros and Guil are partly ignorant of who they are, they become audience watching their own drama, which is but a minor subplot of the great events of Hamlet's life. Funny enough, the theatre audience supposedly knows more about their lives than they themselves do.

By reworking the idea of Pirandellian self-consciousness, Stoppard alternates between consciousness and total blindness. At times Ros and Guil reveal that they are conscious of being onstage - as for example when they refer to the stage as a physical space[14] -, yet at other moments they are completely blind to their reality as characters, advocating a freedom that they are unable to exercise. The Player in RG is much closer to the Pirandellian self-conscious character,

believing that the power of illusion can be greater than that of reality, as I will show in Chapter 5.

To sum up, Stoppard incorporates the Pirandellian reflections on the power of illusion over reality, on the self-consciousness and the independence of the character in relation to his author, on the role of the audience and the importance of the author in his play. In drawing his characters, he somewhat reverses Pirandello's idea of **six characters in search of an author** in that it is **an author - Stoppard - searching for personages**, who borrows traits, attitudes and names from different well-established dramatic characters. Instead of working with Pirandello's supreme character - The Six Characters - who are the very embodiment of illusion- , Stoppard creates the supreme actor - the Player - who stands for the very condition and possibility of art.

3.3. BECKETT'S INFLUENCE: WAITING FOR A PLOT

Be as cautious as he may, man can never forsee the danger that may, at any hour befall him.
(Horace)

The first hour that gave us life, took away also an hour.
(Seneca)

Beckett's Godot undoubtedly influenced Tom Stoppard, as well as all other writers that followed him, as Stoppard himself has acknowledged:

> Waiting for Godot - there's just no telling what sort of effect it had on our society, who wrote because of it, or wrote in a different way because of it. But it really redefined the minima of theatrical experience.[15]

In analysing the characterization of RG, however, I will try to show that Stoppard does not limit himself to Godot's influence. He declared to be more indebted to Beckett's novels than to Godot:

> (...) of the influences that have been invoked on my behalf, (...) I suppose Beckett is the easiest to make, yet the most deceptive. Most people who say Beckett mean Waiting for Godot. They haven't read his novels, for example. I can see a lot of Beckettian things in all my work, but they've not actually to do with the image of two lost souls waiting for something to happen, (...) [16]

Departing from the similarities between Ros and Guil and Didi and Gogo, acknowledged by many critics, I intend to trace other intertextualities between Beckett and Stoppard, which include mainly Beckett's strategies in The Trilogy[17]. In this context, the themes of the search for identity and for meaning in life as well as the deconstruction of traditional ways of rendering character and text-consciousness take the forefront of the debates.

Clearly Ros and Guil resemble Didi and Gogo: they share diminutive names, indicating diminutive lives as opposed to the life of a hero such as Hamlet. In the same way that Beckett's tramps exchange hats and lines, play pointless games and employ comic language with dark undertones, Stoppard's characters also muse over their interchangeable identities, their existence, their non-being and alternate between philosophical outbursts and silly verbal games. They

are clowns modelled on the figures of the Mimus of Antiquity, all lonely, frustrated and powerless creatures.

Beckett tries to dismantle the traditional realistic concept of character of representing one distinct person, leading the reader to philosophical and psychological interrogations over the uniqueness of identity. The theme of identity is thourougly explored in The Trilogy. In Molloy, the Moran/Molloy duality - whether they are one and the same character or different characters that much resemble each other - furnishes a good example of such investigation, which is further pursued in Malone Dies and The Unnamable. As the narrative of the Trilogy progresses, Beckett attempts at recovering his characters as being either earlier stages of the previous narrators or their artistic creations. This is Beckett's strategy of projecting himself within his own work. The readers, as well as the characters themselves, are never sure of who the characters really are: writers, characters in somebody's story or masks for Beckett. The issue of 'how many I's are there in a person' is clearly formulated by Moran:

> The fact was there were three, no four, Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of the same, Gaber's and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me. To these I would add Youdi's were it not for Gaber's corpse fidelity to the letter of his messages. (...) I will therefore add a fifth Molloy, that of Youdi. But would not this fifth Molloy necessarily coincide with the fourth, the real one as the saying is, him dogged by his shadow? I would have given a lot to know. There were others too, of course. But let us leave it at that, if you don't mind, the party is big enough. (M 106)

Stoppard, likewise, deals with problems of identity as evident in Ros's questions, "What is your name?" and "Who do you think you are?" (RG 33). The search for the self in RG is explored in many of its nuances, such as the characters' interchangeability of roles, the alternation of moments of self-consciousness and total blindness, the discussion of the place and role of characters and audience.

One technique employed by both Beckett and Stoppard is to deconstruct traditional realistic characterization by parodying the code of clothing as an index to character.[18] In Molloy, there is a clear instance where this occurs:

> He wore white trousers, a white shirt and a yellow waistcoat, like a chamois he was, with brass buttons and sandals. It is not often that I take cognisance so clearly of the clothes that people wear and I am happy to give you [the reader] the benefit of it. (M 41)

In RG, though Stoppard presents Ros and Guil dressed as Elizabethans, he misleads the audience's expectations as the two characters speak in contemporary language style and seem to be unaware of the Elizabethan world. As the Player clearly asserts, clothes are masks for the self, but masks so close to the skin that we cannot get rid of, becoming the very self they should hide:

> GUIL: Well ... aren't you going to change into your costume?
> PLAYER: I never change out of it, sir. (RG 25)

In Beckett's search for the self, he investigates the roles logic and reason play. His solitary characters, equipped with a limited and fallible instrument - the human mind and comprehension -, resort to mathematics to compensate for the absence of love and true human communication in a chaotic world, as a lengthy passage from Molloy illustrates through the portrayal of the obsession with the distribution of the sucking stones:

> I took advantage of being at the seaside to lay in a store of sucking-stones. They were pebbles but I call them stones. Yes, on this occasion I laid in a considerable store. I distributed them equally between my four pockets, and sucked them turn and turn about. This raised a problem which I first solved in the following way. I had say sixteen stones, four in each of my four pockets, these being the two pockets of my trousers and the two pockets of my greatcoat. Taking a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat and putting it in my mouth, I replaced it in the right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my greatcoat, which I replaced by a stone which was in my mouth, as soon as I have finished sucking it. (...) Thus, there were still four stones in each of my four pockets, but not quite the same stones. (...) (...) (...) And deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone, until the end of time. For they all tasted exactly the same. And if I had collected sixteen, it was not in order to ballast myself in such and such a way, or to suck them turn about, but simply to have a little stone, so as never to be without. But deep down I didn't give a fiddler's curse about being without, when they were all gone they would be all gone, I wouldn't be any the worse off, or hardly any. And the solution to which I rallied in the end was to throw away all the stones but one, whic I kept now in one pocket, now in another, and which of course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed. (...) [19]

Stoppard's clowns, likewise, also resort to logic and mathematics to compensate for the absence of meaning and the lack of direction in life, as Guil's preoccupation with the laws of diminishing returns, of

probability and of the averages demonstrate (RG 8-9). For both Beckett's and Stoppard's characters, the world is puzzling and their sense of identity is feeble.

As I have tried to point out in the previous section, self-consciousness is a preoccupation that Stoppard shares with Beckett as well as with Pirandello. Beckett's characters possess the knowledge of their common plight as human beings, besides, they are constantly aware that they are onstage:

> Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. *(He listens)* But habit is a great deadener. *(He looks again at Estragon)* At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is *sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause)* I can't go on! *(Pause)* What have I said? (WG 90-1)

In this passage, Vladimir muses over the brevity of life, and on the comfort that habitual actions provide us with, protecting us from procastinating over the meaning of life. He also mentions the importance of 'acting' and of witnessing the 'acting' of other persons, as a reminder of the absurdity of our 'being - in- the -world'.

In RG, there are also many instances in which the position of man as 'actor' is also stressed. There is one passage in which Ros and Guil argue with the Player about the mental condition of Hamlet, which turns out to be an enquiry into the nature of reality: in their argument, emphasis is placed on the word 'act', which refers both to the world of the theatre and to the world outside the theatre:

PLAYER: Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special.
(He makes to leave again. Guil loses his cool)
GUIL: But for God's sake, what are we supposed to do!
PLAYER: Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through questioning your situation at every turn.
GUIL: But we don't know what's going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don't know how to *act.*
PLAYER: Act natural. You know why you're here at least.
GUIL: We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true.
PLAYER: For all anyone knows,nothing is. Eveything has to be taken on trust. (...) One acts on assumptions. (...) (RG 49)

Self-consciousness, especially in Beckett's novels, furnishes a privileged viewpoint for dealing with the role of writing, which Stoppard tries to transpose to the stage: Beckett's protagonists are narrators, enclosed in their bedrooms and obsessed with their narrative, struggling with language and memory, sometimes approximating the babbling of a child or the speech of an imbecile, much in the same way that Ros and Guil are obsessed with the finding out of their plot while relying on memory, logic and language games.

Beckett merges the categories of narrator and the narrative, the hero and the writer into one and the same 'I', which has to hold a multiplicity of selves. This balance is all the more difficult, when one remembers that Beckett parodies the description of places and the rendering of the character, as the example below shows:

> The house where Lousse lived. Must I describe it? I don't think so. I won't, that's all I know, for the moment. Perhaps later on, if I get to know it. And Lousse? Must I describe her? I suppose so. Let's first bury the dog. It was she who dug the hole, under

> a tree. You always bury your dog under a tree, I don't know why. (*M* 34)

Stoppard transposes the Beckettian narrators' preoccupation and awareness of the writing process to the character's consciousness of being onstage, of playing roles. In RG, it is the Player who embodies the utmost awareness of being onstage and, thus, he is able to state the ambiguities of having multiple identities.

Beckett chooses outcasts for his anti-heroes, turning them into narrators and vehicles of point of view, thus raising them as prototypes of the twentieth century man. In making his clownish bums face the saddest and yet most human aspects of life, in making them experience the very limits of existence on earth, Beckett turns them into allegories for the human being in the twentieth century, as Estragon states, "He's all humanity" (WG 83).

Stoppard's characterization departs from the Didi/Gogo clownish model and raises similar questions about subjectivity. Yet, while Beckett's world is one of eternal waiting, where the characters are entrapped without the possibility of ever being enlightened, Stoppard's world, on the other hand, is one where Ros and Guil's lack of perspective is contrasted with the Player's vision. The Player, who represents the archetypal character possessing multiple identities, is the embodiment of the twentieth century relativistic and subjective viewpoint. He stands in opposition to Ros and Guil, who are also characters with multiple identities, though they desperately search to

find out who they are and express the need to be guided by some absolute truth.

Having so far dealt with the intertextualities in Stoppard's art of characterization, I will now explore how Stoppard is able to surpass the Prufrockean bewilderment and the Beckettian lack of direction by creating the Player, a Pirandellian-like character whose essence is solely artifice and who becomes RG's centre of consciousness; it is he who voices most of the concerns of Stopard's postmodern relativistic world.

3.4. THE TRANSWORLD IDENTITY OF ROS, GUIL AND THE PLAYER:

All the world is a stage
And all the men and women merely players.
(Shakespeare)

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.
(Shakespeare)

Most of the critical analyses of the characterization of Stoppard's play have centered on Ros and Guil. It is my hypothesis that a more meaningful description needs to be made, one that includes Ros and Guil as well as the Player, in order to understand the innovative nature of Stoppard's character construction.

In the previous sections, by relating Ros and Guil to Eliot's, Pirandello's and Beckett's characters, I have sought to demonstrate

their inconsistency, lack of identity and detachment from their own selves: retaining their Shakespearean names (and fate), in abbreviated or diminutive form in the style of Beckett, they intermingle Beckettian clownish behaviour with Prufrockean fears and indecisons and share a similar predicament with Pirandello's self-conscious characters; however, instead of searching for an author, they search for their own selves. In drawing his characters upon so many intertextualities, Stoppard invites the audience to critically reflect on the nature of a dramatic character and, by extension, upon our very human nature. The vision of the self that emerges is one which accommmodates the many facets of a personality and the complexity, mutability and multiplicity of human attitudes within the same individual, best illustrated by the metaphor of man as actor. Thus, the personage of the Player can be viewed as central to the understanding of the mutliple roles that the characters as well as twentieth century man play in the theatre and in life.

The multiplicity of roles is not, however, an original trait of Stoppard's characterization; its seeds can be found in Hamlet. According to John Dover WILSON, Shakespeare thoroughly discusses the many roles and masks characters perform and wear[20]. Among all the Shakespearean characters, it is Hamlet who plays more roles: he is the prince, the court fool, the madman, the avenger, the lover, the devoted son, the philosopher, the director, the prompter, the playwright, the actor, among others.

Stoppard makes Ros and Guil play several roles: they are the protagonists of RG, yet they do not know their script; they are minor characters and spectators of the events of Hamlet, as well as of their own lives; they are power instruments in the hands of Claudius, playing the spies, the victims and the scapegoats of a tragedy which does not belong to them, and which they are inexorably bound to. Unable to transcend their Shakespearean origin, entrapped in a plot they ignore, they suffer from a Beckettian lack of memory - they do not remember their past, neither do they understand the present, nor can they grasp at their future. They have no knowledge prior to the royal summons and when they are not participating in the Shakespearean script, they act more like characters in search of a script, playing verbal games, recalling previous scenes, falling into disturbing silences. They somehow mirror the audience, silent and unnoticed, watching the unfolding of events which they do not fully comprehend, as Ros says, "I feel like a spectator - an appalling prospect" (RG 31), and Guil later reinforces, "Keep back - we're spectators" (RG 59).

Watching the catastrophes of Denmark's court from the wings, without the possibility of stepping out of their minor parts, they function as poor spectators of their own lives. At a certain point, Ros clearly voices their limited viewpoint by complaining that "half of what he (Hamlet) says meant something else and the other half didn't mean anything at all" (RG 41).

For a certain time after the play starts, Ros and Guil do not address each other by name. It is the arrival of the tragedians which forces them to identification. The Player greets them as "An audience!"(RG 16), referring both to Ros and Guil and to the real theatre audience. Ros, surprised and disturbed to be taken as audience, rushes to introduce the two of them, but only manages to raise the suspicion that they are not 'real persons' :

> ROS: My name is Guildenstern and this is Rosencrantz.
> *(GUIL confers briefly with him)*
> *(Without embarrassment)*
> I'm sorry - *his* name's Guildenstern and *I'm* Rosencrantz.
> (RG 16-7)

The situation above constitutes Stoppard's parody of the Shakespearean interchangeability of roles - as evident in a scene from Hamlet where Gertrude and Claudius mix up the attendant lords' names. In RG, however, the Player interprets their name confusion as some kind of comic performance, and quickly spots them as actors:

> PLAYER: (...) I recognized you at once-
> ROS: And who are we?
> PLAYER: - as fellow artists. (RG 17)

Never certain of what is happening, of what they should be doing or where they are, Ros and Guil lack the knowledge of their own selves. At a certain point, Guil pragmatically tests Ros to check whether the latter discriminates between the two of them:

GUIL : Rosencrantz ...
ROS *(absently, still listening)*: What?
(Pause, short)
GUIL *(gently wry)*: Guildenstern ...
ROS *(irritated by the repetition):* What?
GUIL: Don't you discriminate at all? (RG 38)

Their lack of discernment is corroborated by the fact that they also fail to recognize Hamlet, in a clear parody of the situation of an actor who has not learned his role well:

ROS: Who was that?
GUIL: Didn't you know him?
ROS: He didn't know me.
GUIL: He didn't see you.
ROS: I didn't see him. (RG 34)

It is the Player's double view of them as audience and as fellow artists which resolves the ambiguity of their multiple identities in an equation of the two roles as being 'two sides of the same coin':

PLAYER: For some of us it is performance, for others, patronage.
They are two sides of the same coin, or, let us say, being as there are so many of us, the same side of two coins. (...) RG 17)

In solving the opposition man/actor, the Player's position becomes the ideological centre of the play. His conception of the individual as an actor and, by definition, volatile and multiple, the repository of roles and language styles greatly constrasts with Guil's naive and pre-modern search for the unified, autonomous and homogeneous self. Like the twentieth century man, Ros and Guil would

very much prefer to think of themselves as whole, self-sufficient and self-determining subjects. However, because of the intertextualities upon which they are constructed, the idea of the self that they embody comes closer to those of the contemporary theories such as Christopher Lasch's and the minimal self, Jacques Meunier's and the individual as a hologram, Paul de Man's and the construction of the self, Giles Lipovetsky's and the logic of personalization.[21] In all these theories, the self is not a conscious ego in charge of his own life. Instead, language and ideology are the forces that shape the individual.

Departing from the work of the French Marxist philosopher Louis ALTHUSSER, who states that all ideology "hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject"[22], in other words, that the consciousness of self only occurs after that very self has been 'body-snatched' by ideology, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault have theorized on the issue of subjectivity. They have subordinated the role of the individual to extra-individualistic forces. Taking a more extreme position, FOUCAULT sees the subject not as the originator but as a function of discoursive practices.[23] BARTHES substitutes Althusser's Marxist diagnosis - class struggle and extra-individual forces of production - for language[24]: in his view, it is language that constructs the volatile and multiple subject.

Stoppard, thus, subscribes to a Barthesian view of the self when he employs the shifting from the twentieth century to contemporary idiom as a strategy for signalling Ros and Guil's multiple selves.

Language determines who the characters are impersonating at the moment - if Shakespearean minor support characters or contemporary anti-heroes, or a hybrid of both; moreover, language asserts the supremacy of the world of the stage as a heterotopian space where identitites are interchangeable. As Guil has aptly put it, "Words, words, they are all we have to go on" (RG 31).

In playing the tragic world of Hamlet against the tragi-comic absurd world of Beckett, Stoppard shows how each theatrical form works as a system - a kind of Althusserian ideology or Barthesian linguistic space - which determines (constructs) the self. It is only the metatheatrical universe of the Player that is able to account for the contemporary individual, since individuality is delineated in the confrontation of images, discourses and social relations, being fluid, imagetic and prone to assume all masks and embody all roles without contradictions: the Player's universe can be compared to a hall of mirrors where Shakespeare, Wilde, Eliot, Beckett and Pirandello, among others, are reflected.

The characterization of the Player, thus, stands for Stoppard's own compositional procedures. The Player surprises Ros and Guil as he does not need to change clothes in order to perform, for he is "always in character" (RG 25). For him, to live is to act; he is the epitome of the duality actor/character. He is able to assume different identities, mirroring the twentieth century man who is possessed by a sense of fragmentation and dislocation, living in an age of scattered, contradictory and relative realities.

Characters from Shakespeare's tragedy, Beckettian anti-heroes, or self-conscious Pirandellian characters, Ros and Guil and the Player are built on so many intertextualities and play so many parts that they end up by defying definitions. They inhabit the world of the page and of the stage: not solely Elsinore and the Elizabethan world of Hamlet, not only the leafless absurd world of Didi and Gogo, the tea-parties of Prufrock or the waste land of the modern anti-hero, but also a postmodern version of the metatheatrical Pirandellian world of the 'six characters'.

In the same way as twentieth century men experience the multiplicity and plurality of their selves - at home, at work, at school, at leisure- , so do Ros, Guil and the Player face their multiple origin of being characters with literary pre-existence. The stage is their world: they can be in and out of plots, they can act or observe, but they cannot get away from it. Their ultimate reality is that of being characters. In Umberto ECO's terminology, they have a **transworld identity**, migrating from one ontological plane to the other, as if these were but semipermeable membranes, characters who inhabit the world of heterotopia[25], where a larger number of fragmentary possible worlds coexist in an impossible space.

Stoppard's flickering and unstable characters, like the very world(s) they inhabit, celebrate the stage and the actor as they offer an appropriate metaphor for the multiple individual in a world of multiple realities. However, while Shakespeare deals with roles and masks without disturbing the idea of individuality, Stoppard takes his

experiments a step further: by overloading his characters' personalities with incompatible facets, he shatters the unity of the self.

By highlighting the very intertextual space in which his characters are constructed, Stoppard revalidates the Shakespearean idea of man as actor, made of many flaps and patches and wearing costumes and masks as suits his purposes. Yet, by dismissing the possibility of tragic resolution in the twentieth century, by opting for minor Shakespearean characters as heroes, Stoppard indirectly suggests that even though the world is a stage, we have been and will always be Ros and Guil.

NOTES:

[1]TYNAN, K. Profiles: Withdrawing with Style from Chaos. The New Yorker 53:41, 19 Dec 1977.

[2]HARDIN, N.S. An interview with Tom Stoppard. Contemporary Literature. 22 (2): 158, Spring 1981.

[3] HARDIN, p.158.

[4]Among the critics who analyse the characters of Ros and Guil, LENOFF states that Ros is more pragmatic, simple and practical while Guil is more of a philosopher who attempts to control his emotions by reason and use of logic. (See LENOFF, L. Life Within Limits: Stoppard on the HMS Hamlet. Arizona Quarterly, 38(1):44-61, Spring 1982. Also see SALES, R. Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.* London, Penguin, 1988; DUNCAN, J. Godot Comes: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead..* Ariel, 12(4):57-70, Oct. 1981)

[5]WAUGH, P. Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. London, Methuen, 1987. p.3.

[6]WILDE, O. De Profundis. In: MAINE, G.F. The Works of Oscar Wilde. London, Collins, 1954. p.885

[7]WILDE, p. 885-886.

[8]ECO,U. Lector in Fabula: Pragmatic Strategy in a Metanarrative Text. In: ____. The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979. p.223. Brian McHALE quotes ECO and analyses the recurrence of transworld characters in postmodernist fiction. According to HAWTHORN's glossary **transworld identity** is the same as **homonymy**, i.e., "the reappearance of an entity from one fictional world in another, but with essential changes." (See McHALE, B. Postmodernist Fiction, London, Methuen, 1987. Also see HAWTHORN, J. A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory. London, Edward Arnold, 1992. p.78)

[9]HAYMAN, R. Tom Stoppard. London, Heinemann, 1978. p.11.

[10]T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" will be, hereafter indicated as Prufrock. (In: ALLISON et alli, eds. The Norton Anthology of Poetry. New York, Norton, 1975. p. 1027-1030).

[11] GORDON, G. Extract from an interview with Tom Stoppard. In: BAREHAM, T., ed. Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers and Travesties.* London, Macmillan, 1993.

[12] I will refer to the play Six Characters in Search of an Author both as Six Characters and for quotations as SC, in parenthesis, followed by the page number. (PIRANDELLO, L. Six Characters in Search of an Author. In: BENTLEY, E., ed. Naked Masks: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello. New York, Dutton, 1992.)

[13]When I use the notation "six characters", I am referring to the characters of the Father, the Mother, the Step-Daughter, the Son, the Boy and the Child in opposition to the Actors of the company who are the Manager, the Leading Lady, the Leading Man, the Second Lady, Lead, L'Ingénue, Juvenile Lead, Property Man, Prompter Machinist, Manager's Secretary, Door-Keeper, Scene-shifters and the other Actors and Actresses.

[14]This point will be developed in Chapter Five, which deals with metatheatricality.

[15]STOPPARD, T. Something to Declare. Sunday Times, London, Feb. 25, 1968. p. 46

[16]GORDON, p. 23.

[17]Beckett's trilogy includes Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable, which will be indicated as M, MD and U respectively. (BECKETT, S. The Trilogy. London, Picador, 1979.)

[18]LODGE comments on Beckett's technique of employing clothes as index to character. (LODGE, D. Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature. London, Edward Arnold, 1977. p. 224

[19] Extract from Beckett's Molloy. See BECKETT, p.64-9. I quoted just the first and the last lines of this five-page long extract.

[20]WILSON lists some of these masks: Claudius is the wise ruler and the murderer; Polonius is an old fool and the King's spy, a concerned father as well as one ready to use his daughter in the political game to trap Hamlet; Gertrude is the noble and virtuous Queen and also a lusty woman; Ophelia is an obedient daughter, a woman in love who nevertheless agrees to be used to test Hamlet and thus, betrays his love; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play the double parts of childhood friends and spies. From Hamlet's very first scene, the possibility of interpreting the Ghost as either a good or evil spirit suggests that the Ghost too may be wearing a mask. In sum, most of the characters in Hamlet are hiding their true purposes or aim at testing their theories about Hamlet's madness as the many plays-within-the-play - such as the nunnery scene, the closet scene, the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - show. (See WILSON, J.D. What Happens in *Hamlet*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.)

[21] See LEÃO, L. As Trincheiras da Cidade: O Apart-hotel e os Condomínios Fechados. Rio de Janeiro, 1990. 151 p. M.A. Dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. In chapter four of this dissertation, I discuss theories of the subjectivity, which diagnose the contemporary personality as narcissistic; a summary of the main points developed is as follows, extracted from the dissertation: "Narciso é a figura central do tempo presente. Diversos autores e críticos contemporâneos apontam, de uma forma ou de outra, utilizando conceitos muito próximos, para o retorno do homem sobre si mesmo: o narcisismo coletivo das mini-tribos (Michel Maffesoli), o mínimo eu defensivo (Christopher Lasch), o indivíduo holograma

(Jacques Meunier), a lógica da personalização (Gilles Lipovetsky), entre outros. Em todas essas análises, o indivíduo não é mais tomado como sujeito da linguísitca, da psicanálise, da crítica literária, da antropologia, função de uma estrutura social e psíquica, mas está ligado à estética, aos prazeres, a realidade nova das telecomunicações e informatização. (...) O narcisismo de que nos fala Lasch não pode ser entendido como fenômeno psicológico - o amor de si, o egoísmo, o auto-interesse - mas como fenômeno social e cultural. (...) Lasch conceitua esse padrão narcísico centrado na mentalidade de sobrevivência de **mínimo eu**. (...) Lipovestky fala da lógica da sedução e da produção de deserto. A sedução é non-stop, presente na profusão de imagens, serviços e produtos - informação 24 horas por dia, TV a cabo, vitrines, infinitas prateleiras nos hipermercados, moda - enfim, a sedução se alia aos processos de personalização e torna-se "princípio de organização global das sociedades de abundância". (...) Incapazes de viver o outro, obsecados por nós mesmos, nossas imagens por nossos corpos e sexos, por nossa privacidade, seduzidos dentre todas a seduções possíveis por nossa própria imagem, somos agentes de nosso próprio deserto." (See LIPOVETSKY, G. L'ere du Vide: Essais sur l'individualisme Contemporain. Paris, Gallimard, 1983; LASCH, C. The Culture of Narcissism. New York, Warner, 1979; LASCH, C. O Mínimo Eu. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1987.)

[22]ALTHUSSER, L. Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. London, New Left Books, 1971. p.162.

[23]FOUCAULT, M. What's an Author? In: HARARI, J., ed. Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism. London, Methuen, 1980.

[24]BARTHES, R. The Death of the Author. In: HEALTH, S., ed. Image-Music-Text. London, Fontana, 1977.

[25]McHALE, p.44.

4. WORDS, WORDS, WORDS ...: STOPPARD'S PREOCCUPATION WITH LANGUAGE AND STYLE.

We must speak by the card, or [in]*vocation will undo us.*
(Shakespeare)

Words, words. They're all we have to go on.
(T. Stoppard)

Rather than the creation of an original plot and consistent characters, Stoppard's main concern in RG centres around language. Stoppard himself has admitted his enormous love for language:

> For a lot of writers the language they use is merely a fairly efficient tool. For me the particular word in the right place, or a group of words in the right order, to create a particular effect is important; it gives me more pleasure than to make a point which I might consider to be profound.[1]

Stoppard's preoccupation with style, his reliance on metalanguage, his taste for puns, verbal games, double meanings, non-sequiturs and jokes, invite the audience to partake in the play's process of composition. The juxtaposition of different literary forms - the idioms of Shakespeare and Beckett - and the contrast of codes - the poetical and the scientific, the philosophical and the colloquial, the elevated and the grotesque - ambush the audience by shattering their expectations about the rules and conventions of theatrical tradition. In the present chapter, I will survey how Stoppard explores language by deconstructing rules, by proposing a reflection upon the relationship

between form and content, and by showing how language creates reality. What becomes foremost is the primacy of words within RG's intertextual metatheatrical universe.

Stoppard highlights the role of language as giving support and solidity to a reality that is a social and linguistic construct, by playing the rich texture of the Elizabethan language against the twentieth century preference for fragmentary speech, evident especially in Beckett. Without privileging either world order or language code, he dramatizes their clash and points at the artificiality of language: words are not empty forms which receive a certain content, i.e., they are not neutral repository for ideas, but rather, they betray an ideological relationship to the world they belong to. Each linguistic code not only reflects a world order, but moreover, embodies this very order. The Elizabethan idiom is only permissible within that universe; placed in a contemporary situation it becomes artificial, ridiculously pompous, empty, purposeless.

By incorporating Shakespearean speeches, Stoppard purposively frustates the audience's expectations. He avoids Hamlet's famous philosophical soliloquies and elevated speeches full of rich imagery, and draws attention, instead, to less important passages which employ more straightforward language - the matter-of-fact exchange of words, greetings and silent scenes. This, to a certain extent, has the effect of defamiliarizing[2] Shakespeare's play to an audience expecting famous soliloquies, while proving his great understanding of the incipient mixture of high and low contained in Shakespeare's textual universe[3].

The same kind of defamiliarization occurs in relation to the fragmentary speech modelled after Beckett: the puns, games and cross-talks, the idle exchanges of trivialities, surprisingly contain deep and serious philosophical and existential speculations.

Thus, Stoppard reverses the audience's expectations concerning the Shakespearean and the contemporary linguistic codes. He asserts the place of the author as the great manipulator of conventions, as the creator of a linguistic universe "capable of accommodating (...) mutually exclusive worlds"[4] - that of Shakespeare and that of Beckett. In a way, Stoppard impersonates Hamlet in the sense that, in Shakespeare, it is the self-conscious hero who parodies the court language - especially that of Polonius, Laertes and Osric[5]. In other words, language parody, which in Hamlet is presented as a character's game, in RG becomes an author's game.

In this game, the author manipulates the characters - they change idioms and worlds without being totally aware of it. Alternating between moments of self-consciousness and blindness, between blank verse and colloquial contemporary speech, between the highly formalized language of the Elizabethan court and the fragmentary Beckettian idiom, Ros and Guil "operate on two (in fact, several) levels" (RG 49). What Stoppard achieves is a kind of reflection from the part of the audience on man's great adaptability to rules and language registers, and on the artificiality and the conventionality inherent in language and in theatrical forms.

Stoppard's language exploration is greatly indebted to Beckett, as he himself has admitted more than once, for both authors resort to similar patterns of dialogue, work with multiple meanings, share a similiar humour and explore the place of language in communication:

> (...) there's a Beckett joke which is the funniest joke in the world to me. It appears in various forms but it consists of a confident statement followed by immediate refutation by the same voice. It's a constant process of elaborate structure and sudden dismantlement.[6]

> (...) I find Beckett deliciously funny in the way that he qualifies everything as he goes along, reduces, refines and dismantles. [7]

The structure which Beckett uses in his novels and plays is based on Saint Augustine's pattern of reflection; basically, it consists of the posing of two contradictory propositions with no resolution:

> There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned'[8]

The Augustinian structure is precisely the form in which Stoppard rewrites the Shakespearean tragedy. While Shakespeare raises issues which he successfully manages to resolve within the tragic pattern of the deaths and the re-establishement of order, Stoppard departs from the same plot line and, without changing it in its essence, achieves a **paradoxical unresolvability** - Ros and Guil are **dead** as the very title of the play announces, but they are **not dead** after all for they have a chance of reappearing on the stage night after

night, as the metatheatrical portrayal of their deaths suggests: "Now you see me, now you ____." (RG 96)

Stoppard has admitted that

> there is very often no single, clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters and they tend to play a sort of leap-frog. You know, an argument, a refutation, then a new rebuttal of the refutation, then a counter-rebuttal, so that there is never any point in this intellectual leap-frog at which I feel that is the speech to stop it, that is the last word.[9]

In other words, his dialogues are built on the Beckettian/Augustinian structure which consists of a statement followed by its immediate retraction, thus reaching no conclusion and pointing at the arbitrariness of language and the multiplicity of meanings. He has declared that the dialogue is "the most respectable way of contradicting oneself in public"[10], as it permits one to show two sides of each question. In the following examples by Beckett and Stoppard, we can perceive how the utterances are reinterpreted differently by each character's frame of mind:

> VLADIMIR(*stooping*): True. (*He buttons his fly.*) Never neglect the little things of life.
> ESTRAGON: What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.
> VLADIMIR: (*musingly*) The last moment ... (*He medidates*) Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that? (WG 10)

> ROS: I'm afraid
> GUIL: So am I.
> ROS: I'm afraid it isn't your day.
> GUIL: I'm afraid it is. (RG 10)

> PLAYER: Yes, we were dead lucky there. If that's the word I'm after.

ROS (*not a pick up*): Dead?
PLAYER: Lucky.
ROS (*he means*): Is he dead?
PLAYER: Who knows. (RG 90)

In the first extract, Estragon says 'You always wait to the last moment' referring to the postponing of every day duties; Valdimir re-echoes the words 'till the last moment' medidatively, reinvesting them with the connotation of the moment of death. In the examples from RG, we encounter a similar strategy for dramatizing the relativity of values and perspectives: when Ros says 'I'm afraid ...', he means 'I think'; Guil, however, answers, 'So am I', for he understands Ros as saying 'I fear'. Likewise, the word play around the expression 'dead lucky', where dead and lucky are taken both separately and as forming a single expression, proves the incommunicability of the characters. The Player means that they were 'dead lucky' to have survived the pirate's attack, but Ros, deeply disturbed by Hamlet's disappearance and its possible consequences, concentrates on the word 'dead'.

There are many other instances where Stoppard explores the several meanings words contain, and how different frames of mind reinterpret them, many times causing comic misunderstandings. In the following extract, the word play built around verb tense - 'grow' and 'started to grow'- shifts the audience's attention to verbal theatre. In the same extract, Stoppard also hightlights how punctuation can change meaning: by taking out commas, Ros's perfectly normal

statement - 'The toenails, on the other hand, never grow at all' - becomes absurd:

> ROS *(cutting his fingernails)*: Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard.
> GUIL: What?
> ROS *(loud)*: Beard!
> GUIL: But you're not dead.
> ROS *(irritated)*: I didn't say they *started* to grow after death.
> *(Pause, calmer.)* The fingernails also grow before birth, though *not* the beard.
> GUIL: What?
> ROS (*shouts*): Beard! What's the matter with you?
> (*Reflectively.*) The toenails, on the other hand, never grow at all.
> GUIL (*bemused*): The toenails on the other hand never grow at all?
> ROS: Do they? It's a funny thing - I cut my fingernails al the time, and every time I think to cut them, they need cutting. Now, for instance. And yet, I never, to the best of my knowledge, cut my toenails. (...)
> (RG 13)

A similar procedure occurs when Guil says to the Player, "I have influence **yet**" (italics mine) meaning he **still** has influence at the court of Denmark; the Player, though, understands the utterance as unfinished and asks, "Yet what?"(RG 19).

Language misunderstanding can also be caused by the use of the pronoun. In the following example, when the Player summarizes what Polonius thinks about Hamlet's madness, the pronoun 'his' causes Ros to misunderstand the Player's remark. To clarify things, the latter has to literally deconstruct the sentence, cutting it in smaller phrases and inverting its natural order:

PLAYER: The old man thinks he's in love with his daughter.
ROS *(appalled)*: Good God! We're out of depth here.
PLAYER: No, no, no- *he* hasn't got a daughter - the old man thinks he's in love with *his* daughter.
ROS: The old man is?
PLAYER: Hamlet, in love with the old man's daughter, the old man thinks . (RG 51)

Pronunciation, likewise, can cause misunderstandings and be a source of comicality, as the word play between 'of course' and 'off course' in the passage below shows:

GUIL: We must have gone north, of course.
ROS: Off course?
GUIL: Land of the midnight sun, that is.
ROS: Of course.
(....) (...) (...)
GUIL: Unless we are off course.
ROS (*small pause*): Of course. (RG 74)

The above passages reveal the flexibility of language and rules, and point at the powerlessness of language in bridging the characters' communication gap. Language changes not only diachronically - the differences separating the Shakespearean and the twentieth century use of language - but also synchronically - twentieth century idiom is in itself a source of misunderstanding.

Thus, for Stoppard, language is not a transparent means of communication; much the contrary, his use of language devalues it as a way of expressing ideas and points to its very limitation and disintegration. Jill LEVENSON has observed that for Stoppard "the simplest statement or question can become an amazing source of

perplexity"[11], as the following example shows in the word play among 'exactly', 'whys' and 'whats':

PLAYER: Why?
GUIL: Ah. (*To ROS*) Why?
PLAYER: Exactly.
GUIL: Exactly what?
ROS: Exactly why.
GUIL: Exactly *why what*?
ROS: What?
GUIL: *Why?*
ROS: Why what, exactly? (RG 50)

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN's language games, developed in his Philosophical Investigations[12], help to account for language in RG. For the philosopher neither language nor games possess a single meaning; both defy definitons because they are complex and have no 'essential nature'. Words are ambiguous, and language is a game which the characters must play in order to go on living.

Stoppard asserts the importance of verbal games in his commentary that RG is simply a play where "two chaps (are) (...) playing games"[13]. These chaps need to tell tales, no matter how idiotic, to entertain each other and the audience, to keep the show going. In Godot, Beckett recreates the idiot who ceaselessly tells tales: Lucky clears his throat and scratches his nose, puts on his hat and pathetically dances, fragments language and defies the possibility of comprehension by the very speed of his pantomine, allucinating truths and overstating nonsense. Stoppard partakes the Beckettian idea that language is powerless to render meaning, yet he tries, through his

games, to redesign the tragic pattern in the twentieth century universe.

At certain moments, especially during Act I of RG, Guil somewhat embodies the Elizabethan worldview and questions reality - the lack of logic in the game of coin-tossing, the power of words to account for reality, the issue of life and death. He rephrases Hamlet's contempt for words and his disillusionment with the world. All Hamlet has learned from books serves nothing at all when he faces the task of avenging his dead father; and even so, "like a whore", he is compelled "to unpack his heart with words" (Ham 2.2.537). Guil, likewise, distrusts the power of words to render reality, and yet he realizes that words are the only reality they have: "Words, words, they're all we have to go on". (RG 31). However, at the same time, he is able to experience a defamiliarization in relation to words, evident in the following passage:

> GUIL: (...) Has it ever happened to you that all of a sudden and for no reason at all you haven't the faintest idea how to spell the word - 'wife' - or - 'house' because when you write it down you just can't remember ever having seen those letters in that order before ... ?
> (RG 29)

Another clear example of the problems created by language becomes evident when Ros is unable to understand the rules of the game entitled 'play at questions', in which Guil impersonates Hamlet and Ros impersonates both himself and Guil, in a kind of rehearsal of the investigation they should carry out with the Prince:

GUIL: (...) Glean what afflicts him.
ROS: Me?
GUIL: Him.
ROS: How?
GUIL: Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways.
ROS: He's afflcited.
GUIL: You question, I'll answer.
ROS: He's not himself, you know.
GUIL: I'm him, you see.
(Beat)
ROS: Who I am then?
GUIL: You're yourself.
ROS: And he's you?
GUIL: Not a bit of it.
ROS: Are you afflicted?
GUIL: That's the idea. Are you ready?
ROS: Let's go back a bit.
GUIL: I'm afflicted.
ROS: I see.
GUIL: Glean what afflicts me.
ROS: Right.
GUIL: Question and answer.
ROS: How should I begin?
GUIL: Address me.
ROS: My dear Guildenstern!
GUIL*(quietly):* You've forgotten - haven't you?
ROS: My dear Rosencrantz!
GUIL *(great control)*: I don't think you quite understand. What we are attempting is a hypothesis in which *I* answer for *him* while *you* ask me questions. (RG 34-35)

Ros's difficulty in understanding the game, which is essentially play-acting, illustrates his existential difficulty in understanding the rules of life, and his metatheatrical difficulty of understanding the rules of the theatre. Neither are Ros and Guil good at the art of living - for they end up dead, trapped in a political plot - nor are they good at the art of interpreting - for they are actors who forget lines and need clues. Language dramatizes their isolation: Ros does not grasp Guil's philosophical arguments nor its metatheatrical implications, merely

catching loose words here and there and responding to them automatically and absent-mindedly. Between them, no real communication occurs for they misinterpret each other.

The coexistence of seriousness and comicality is one of Stoppard's strategies in investigating language: by overloading apparently simple and matter-of-fact statements with philosophical, metatheatrical, sexual and pornographic implications, his language becomes dense with connotations. In the game 'play at questions' (RG 31-34), for example, Ros and Guil are only allowed to ask questions: questions cannot be repeated, cannot be rhetorical, following one another logically, thus not violating the principle of non-sequiturs. Inserted in the playful context of the game, Ros and Guil ask questions that indeed are pregnant to Stoppard's universe, being reechoed throughout the play such as the role chance and God play in man's life:

> ROS: Is there a choice?
> GUIL: Is there a God?
> ROS: Foul! No *non sequiturs*, three -two, one game all. (RG 33)

Under the guise of apparently silly games, there are serious philosophical ideas that worry the characters. In the following extract, perspectivism, relativity and identity are among the issues raised:

> GUIL*(seriously)*: What's your name?
> ROS: What's yours?
> GUIL: I asked first.
> ROS: Statement. One-love.
> GUIL: What's your name when you're at home?
> ROS: What's yours?

GUIL: When I'm at home?
ROS: Is it different at home?
GUIL: What home?
ROS: Haven't you got one?
GUIL: Why do you ask?
ROS: What are you driving at?
GUIL*(with emphasis)*: What's your name?!
ROS: Repetition. Two-love. Match point to me.
GUIL *(seizing him violently)*: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
ROS: Rhetoric! Game and match! *(Pause.)* Where is it going to end? (RG 33)

When Ros asks 'Where is it going to end', he metaleptically short-circuits the very game being played, opening a new field of associations, which interrogates at once the very nature of the game they have been involved, and the action and status of the play RG, which metaphorically stands for real life:

ROS*(voice in the wilderness)*: What's the game?
GUIL: What are the rules? (RG 33)

The implication is clear: life is a sort of game which the two characters do not know how to play. Metatheatrically, the passage implies that acting is also a game and that the real-life actors playing Ros and Guil do not know the rules of acting. In fact, the metaphor of life as a game is corroborated by the fact that Guil states, in an earlier passage, that their encounter with Hamlet is a sort of game:

GUIL: Exactly, it's a matter of asking the right questions and giving away as little as we can. It's a game. (RG 30)

Thus, by playing at questions (RG 31), Ros and Guil play at words and at worlds.

The most common double meaning that Stoppard uses is the metatheatrical. RG's pattern of conversations, though it makes perfect sense at the literal level, is overloaded with constant references to the history of drama and the world of the theatre. In fact, by opening his play with the image of the coin-tossing game, Stoppard suggests that Ros and Guil's existential situation in life as well as RG's place in the history of drama is a kind of game: one side of the coin stands for the world of Hamlet; the other, for the twentieth century world.

Likewise, the sentences "There is an art to the building of suspense" (RG 7) and "What about suspense?" (RG 9) constitute two of Guil's speeches which refer both to the coin-tossing game and the theatre. Again and again the world of the stage and the real world are equated. For example, Guil's phrase "(...) on the wind of a windless day" (RG 13) is either absurd or refers to the world of the stage.

The overlapping of the world of the stage and the world of the theatre is suggested by Guil as well as by Ros. When Ros exclaims, talking about a probable messenger sent by king Claudius, "(...) Oh I've got it now - that man, a foreigner, he woke us up -" (RG 14), he is metatheatrically referring to the author, Tom Stoppard, who is a foreigner. The theatre and the world are the two sides of the coin, linguistically tossed throughout the play.

Guil's complaint of a lack of direction in their life reverberates into a metatheatrical complaint about the action of the play:

> GUIL: Practically starting from scratch ... An awakening, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters, our names shouted in a certain dawn, a message, a summons ...A new record of heads and tails. We have not been ... picked out .. simply to be abandoned... set loose to find our own way ....We are entitled some direction ... I would have thought. (RG 14)

Guil's words, thus, constitute both an existential statement of the purposelessness of life and a self-parody of the play. Corroborating his complaints about the lack of direction, the Player also makes a remark about the decadence of the theatre in general:

> PLAYER: Why, we grow rusty and you catch us at the very point of our decadence - by this time tomorrow we might have forgotten everything we ever knew. That's a thought, isn't it? *(He laughs generously).* We'd be back where we started - improvising. (RG 16)

References to the theatre and to its history abound, making the understanding of the play dependable on the audience's familiarity with the history of drama and the literary works being alluded. Sentences and situations, dialogues and characters from other writers are reappropriated, recontextualized and recreated. Certain lines are reechoed throughout the play, becoming a kind of motto, such as the example below, modelled after the Christian prayer - 'Give us this day our daily bread' - shows:

> GUIL: Give us this day our daily mask. (RG 30)

> GUIL: Give us this day our daily week. (RG 34)

GUIL: Give us this day our daily cue. (RG 77)

GUIL: Call us this day our daily tune. (RG 86)

The emphasis on language, as referring both to the real world and the world of the stage, as well as the emphasis on parody, allusion and repetition invites us to read RG as a **metaplay** in which characters, at times self-conscious, at times blind to their situation, dwell on metatheatrical situations. Language contributes to the construction of a self-conscious text and, at the same time, imprisons the characters in a universe where meaning is multiple.

Another of Stoppard's favourite language connotation is the play on sexual innuendo. For example, the conversation between Ros and the Player, which is supposedly about the cost of a performance, in fact connotes the price of a sexual favour:

ROS: And how much?
PLAYER: To take part?
ROS: To watch.
PLAYER: Watch what?
ROS: A private performance.
PLAYER: How private?
ROS: Well, there are only two of us. Is that enough?
PLAYER: For an audience, dissapointing. For voyers, about average.
ROS: What's the difference?
PLAYER: Ten guilders.
ROS (*horrified*): Ten guilders! (RG 18)

There are many passages where a sexual implication lies behind the conversation of the Player and the two attendant lords[13]. What

Stoppard implies - apart from showing that language can condense many layers of meaning, depending on how one decodifies the message - is that the theatre is not only art, but also a commercial enterprise.

In working with Shakespeare's and Beckett's idioms, Stoppard plays a kind of tennis match with the two authors. On one side of the court, we find Beckett's Didi and Gogo; on the other, Shakespeare's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Between them, the boredom of the waiting, the foolish verbal games. In fact, Stoppard borrows the vocabulary of a tennis match in certain dialogues as the idea of the game offers an appropriate parody for RG: Stoppard's play is about playing, where the characters are the playthings of destiny and of a script they are hardly aware of.

Stoppard's writing method, thus, is playful, yet there is seriousness of purpose. His dialogues follow the pattern of a ping-pong game, where arguments are played against counterarguments, as he himself affirms,

> I might subscribe to certain beliefs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and to a totally different set on Tuesdays and Thursdays ... I always write about two people arguing. I play ping-pong with myself (...)[14]

In sum, Stoppard explores the role of language by dealing with the many aspects concerning language - semantics, syntax, verb tense and punctuation- and by juxtaposing different historical language codes - the Elizabethan and the twentieth century language. Not only do

people not listen to each other, but when they do, they decodify the messages according to their own point of view and perceptions. By calling attention to the gap between what one means to say, and what is understood, Stoppard raises the issue of the limited power of language to convey meaning. Rather than transparently reflecting the world - the feelings, emotions, ideas, objects - the view of language that Stoppard adopts is self-referential, paradoxical and metalinguistic. Language has a reality of its own; the semantics, the punctuation, the pronouns, the pronunciation invite multiple interpretations. Language does not resolve misunderstandings but perpetuates them, entangling people in a vicious circle of talking endlessly without the possibility of ever being heard or understood. This 'linguisitic loneliness', if we may call it so, is a direct criticism on language as a means of communication and as a medium for the discovery of metaphysical truths.

NOTES:

[1]STOPPARD, T. Something to Declare. Sunday Times, London, Feb 25, 1968. p.46.

[2]The term defamiliarization, which means **to make strange**, was first used by the Russian theorist Viktor SHKLOVSKY. He holds that the function of art is to challenge the automatic and habitual perception of life and thus, to recover a direct grasp on things. Another Russian formalist, Boris TOMASCHEVSKY, also refers to the concept, as well as Mikhail BAKHTIN. (See SHKLOVSKY, V. Theory of Prose. Illinois, Dalkey Archive Press, 1990. p. 6-12.: LEMON, L. & REIS, M., eds. Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1965. p.86; BAKHTIN, M. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984. p.111.)

[3]In Hamlet, the crude language employed by Ophelia in her madness greatly opposes the very formal and courtier way in which she previously addressed her father and Hamlet. The gravedigger's speeches also illustrate this contrast: the Gravedigger's pregnant remarks, though apparently attached to literal meaning, contrast with the court members' silly figures of speech, their elaborate and refined phrasing which serves to cover up their actions and intentions. CLEMEN comments on the variety of language in Hamlet: "there is a similar variety in the language, for we wear stylized speeches as well as rapid prose dialogue, rich and formal Elizabethan verse alongside coarse jokes, witty repartee of high comedy and the slang of everyday speech, melodramatic rhetoric in the scenes of grand passion, and simple, terse utterances in moments of distress." (See CLEMEN, W. Shakespeare's Dramatic Art. London, Methuen, 1972. p.198.)

[4]McHALE, B. Postmodernist Ficiton. London, Methuen, 1987. p. 44

[5]The juxtaposition of opposed language styles is an idea already present in Hamlet: Hamlet likes to parody the language of the court, namely that of Polonious, of Osric and of Laertes.

[6]HAYMAN, R. First interview with Tom Stoppard. In: _____. Tom Stoppard. London, Heinemann, 1978. p.7.

[7]GORDON, G. Extract from an interview with Tom Stoppard. In: BAREHAM, T., ed. Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers and Travesties.* London, Macmillan, 1993. p.23.

[8]ESSLIN, M. The Theatre of the Absurd. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978, p.83.

[9]STOPPARD, T. Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas. Theatre Quarterly. 14:7, May/July 1974.

[10]ARMORY, M. The Joke's the Thing. Sunday Times Magazine. London, 9 Jun 1974. p.71.

[11]LEVENSON, J. Hamlet Andante/Hamlet Allegro: Tom Stoppard's Two Versions. Shakespeare Survey, 36: 26, 1983.

[12]WITTGENSTEIN, L. The Philosophical Investigations. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958. p. Among other critics who employed the language studies of Wittgenstein to decodify Stoppard's universe, B. ROTHSTEIN holds that of all game theories - Eric Berne's, Johann Huizinga's, Jean Piaget's, Erving Goffman's - Wittgenstein's is the most appropriate as it describes rather than defines language games. Other critics to mention games as an apt metaphor for Stoppard's art are SALES and CAMATI. (See ROTHSTEIN,B Playing The Game: The Work of Tom Stoppard. Rhode Island, 1979. 258 p. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rhode Island.SALES, R. Tom Stoppard. London, Penguin, 1988; CAMATI, A. The Serio-Comic Theatre of Tom Stoppard: Parodic Theatricality in *Travesties*. Doctorship thesis - Universidade de São Paulo, 1987.)

[13]Among the many passages in RG that contain sexual innuendos, there are "We'll stoop to anything if that's your bent..."(RG 18); "Get you skirt on, Alfred, (...) and for eight you can particpipate (...) taking eihter part, (...) or both of them. (...) with encores."(RG 19); "You and I, Alfred, we could createa dramatic precednet here." (RG 19).

[14]HAYMAN, R. Second Interview. In: _____. Tom Stoppard. London, Heinemann, 1978. p. 17.

5 MEETING DEATH IN THE THEATRE

To study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one's self to die. (Cicero)

We are all bound to one voyage; the lot of all, sooner or later, is to come out of the urn. All must to eternal exile sail away. (Horace)

But in dying, which is the greatest work we have to do, practice can give us no assistance at all.. A man may fortify himself against pain, shame, necessity, and such like accidents, but, as to death, we can experiment it but once, and are all apprentices when we come to it. (Montaigne)

RG revolves around the theatre itself: all the issues it raises, specially the theme of death, are dealt within this metatheatrical frame. The result is a creative use of metatheatricality in a postmodern context.

Although we find evidence of metatheatricality since the Renaissance, especially in Shakespeare and Calderón de la Barca, it is in contemporary writing that it takes the forefront of the debates and becomes pervasive in almost all works in the form of self-consciousness: the text contains critical reflections on its own status as an artistic construction, and on the fictionality of the 'real' world. The relation between metatheatricality and postmodernism is indeed very close, for as Brian McHALE writes, postmodernism is an illusion-breaking art as it systematically disturbs the sense of reality by constantly calling attention to the ontological structure of the text.[1]

Metatheatricality, in a postmodern sense, constitutes a form of self-reflexivity and an invitation for the audience to actively participate in the play. Thus, the metatheatre of Stoppard becomes a tool for investigating the nature of his own art and art in general, as well as mimetically interrogating the nature of the world we live in.

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed metatheatricality in relation to world-construction and frame-breaking; to characterization - individuals performing roles rather than being selves; and to language as an independent system which constructs the world rather than reflects it. Now, I will concentrate on metatheatricality as expressed in the constant references to the physicality of the stage and on its relation to the theme of death.

5.1. THEATRE AS THEATRE

I could a tale unfold whose lighest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotty and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.
(Shakespeare)

Metatheatre has replaced tragedy. (Lionel Abel)

In parodying, Hamlet and Godot, Stoppard defamiliarizes both plays, foregrounding the theatre as the place where the overlapping of universes may occur. The self-consciousness of being in a special space

as the stage is already present in Shakespeare as, for example, when Hamlet addresses the Ghost mentioning that his voice comes from under the stage. RG, likewise, contains similar references to the physicality of the theatre, showing thus Stoppard's indebteness to Shakespeare:

> HAMLET: Ha,ha,boy! sayst thou so? art thou there truepenny?
> Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage.
> Consent to swear. (Ham 1.5.150-152)

> *(GUIL, examining the confines of the stage, flips over two more coins (....))* (RG 8)

> *(ROS considers the floor; slaps it)*
> ROS: Nice bit of a planking, that. (RG 75)

There are many other instances that call attention to the theatre as theatre. For example, when the stage-directions indicate that Ros, naively - as an actor who does not know he is supposed to pretend that the stage is reality - 'studies the floor' in order to establish where the wind is coming from, while Guil reprimands him and tells him that "that's not a direction" (RG 43). The long discussions about the time of the day, and the cardinal points also contribute to highlight the physicality of the stage.[3]

The references to the fact that we are in a theatre constantly remind the audience of their place and role as well as of the fictional nature of what goes on onstage. In the boat scene (Act III), for

example, Ros and Guil, in a Beckettian dialogue, discuss the possibility of someone appearing:

> GUIL(*pause*): No, somebody might come in.
> ROS: In where?
> GUIL: Out here.
> ROS: In out here? (RG 75)

The use of the verb 'come in' is inappropriate when people are on a boat, as the preposition 'in' suggests an enclosed space; on the other hand, the 'out here' is appropriate for the open air space, the boat in the midst of the sea, where they are. When Ros combines the two forms in saying 'in out here', he is calling attention to the fact that the boat episode occurs *on* the stage, *in* the theatre.

The emphasis on the physicality of the stage breaks the illusion of the fourth wall, which throughout the play, is shattered. In the following extract, Ros threatens to vomit on the audience:

> (*ROS inhales with expectation,exhales with boredom. GUIL stands up and looks over the audience*)
> GUIL: One is free on a boat. For a time. Relatively.
> ROS: What's it like?
> GUIL: Rough.
> (*ROS joins him.They look over the audience.*)
> ROS: I think I'm going to be sick.
> (*GUIL licks a finger,holds it up experimentally*)
> GUIL: Other side, I think. (ROS goes upstage. (...))(RG 75-6)

> ROS: Fire!
> (*GUIL jumps up*)
> GUIL: Where?
> ROS: It's all right -I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To prove that it exists. *(He regards the audience, that is the direction, with contempt - and other directions, then*

> *front again.)* Not a move. They should burn to death in their shoes. (RG 44)

By implying the audience would burn in their shoes, Stoppard incites them to action. This strategy reaches its highest point when in the boat scene, Hamlet, contrary to the Shakespearean script, spits into the audience:

> *(HAMLET comes down to footlights and regards the audience.The others watch but don't speak. HAMLET clears his throat noisily and spits into the audience. A split second later he claps his hand to his eye and wipes himself. He goes back upstage.)* (RG 88)

It is deeply ironical that Hamlet, known as the hero of inaction, is turned into an agent for promoting the audience's reaction. In Stoppard's theatre, the audience is not allowed to lie back in their seats and enjoy a good performance; they are playfully threatened to 'burn in their shoes', to 'take action', to be spitted and vomitted upon, which leads them to reflect on their very roles as audience.

Stoppard takes a step further in his metatheatrical strategies when he makes his characters act as audience to other characters, posing the interchangeability of being actors or audience. This is clear when the Player suggests that, instead of just watching the play, Ros and Guil could also take part in the action, in a speech which, in a sense, also deflates the theatre in relating it to commerce and to pornography:

PLAYER: It costs little to watch, and little more if you happen to be caught up in the action, if that's your taste and times being what they are.
ROS: What are they?
PLAYER: Indifferent.
ROS: Bad?
PLAYER: Wicked. Now what precisely is your pleasure? *(He turns to the TRAGEDIANS.)* Gentlemen, disport yourselves. *(The TRAGEDIANS shuffle into some kind of line.)* There! See anything you like?
ROS (*doubtful, innocent*): What do they do?
PLAYER: Let your imagination run riot. They are beyond surprise.
ROS: And how much?
PLAYER: To take part?
ROS: To watch.
PLAYER: Watch what?
ROS: A private performance.
PLAYER: How private?
ROS: Well, there is two of us. Is that enough?
PLAYER: For an audience, disappointing. For voyers, about average.
(RG 17)

According to McHALE, the emphasis on the physicality of the theatre is due to the fact that it offers a more visible ground for exploring ontological boundaries, which, in the novel are explored through different narrative levels and in real life take the form of a preoccupation with the threshold between life and death :

> The fundamental ontological boundary in theatre is a literal, physical threshold equally visible to the audience and(if they are permitted to recognize it) the characters: namely, the footlights, the edge of the stage.[4]

Thus, in underlining the physicality of the stage, Stoppard creates a metatheatrical context in which the theme of death is reworked, as I will show in the next section.

5.2. DEATH AS A FAILING TO REAPPEAR ON THE STAGE:

What is our life? a play of passion.
Our mirth? the music of division.
Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be,
Where we are dress'd for this short comedy
Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is
That sits and marks still who doth act amiss
Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done;
Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
Only we die in earnest - that's no jest.
(Orlando Gibbons)

In his re-writing of Hamlet, Stoppard respects the critical perspective of complexity While in Hamlet it is very difficult to pinpoint the central theme, in RG Stoppard parodies this difficulty, giving it a comic twist: instead of critics baffling over Hamlet, Stoppard offers us two characters who, though involved in the action, are unable to account for it. Ros and Guil are ordinary characters, confronted with extraordinary events, of which they fail to grasp the meaning, despite their great efforts at philosophical speculations.

Bearing in mind Hamlet's inexhaustible critical material, and the difficulties at arriving at a conclusion about the play's theme, Stoppard purposively also makes it very difficult to say what RG is about. However, while Hamlet's complexity arises, at least partially, from its abundance of themes and its interwoven plot and sub-plots, RG's difficulty lies in its very lack of a definite and original plot and a clear theme. By bringing Hamlet's discussion of a life after death to the

twentieth century context, Stoppard attempts at articulating Shakespeare's 'to be or not to be' in the fragmentary twentieth century idiom: in RG, it is not Hamlet who voices the concerns about existence, but rather the two attendant lords. Stoppard defamiliarizes certain themes of Hamlet, and through that strategy, reveals the whole difference in the mental life and cultural values of two widely separated epochs of civilization.

Thus, it is within a metatheatrical context that Stoppard rephrases one of Hamlet's central themes, that is also present in Godot: death. For Hamlet, death is a possibility that he contemplates from his very first soliloquy:

> HAMLET: O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew;
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon'gainst self-slaughter! (Ham 1.2.130-132)

Later, Hamlet expresses his attraction to death as a way of escaping from his conflicts:

> HAMLET: You cannot sir take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal: except my life, except my life, except my life. (Ham 2.2. 209-210)

As the central soliloquy in Hamlet - 'to be or not to be' - shows death is a way of escaping from the 'slings and arrows of outrageous

fortune' (Ham 3.1.56-89) and all the 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable (...) uses of this world' (Ham 1.2.133-134). In RG, Stoppard transmutes these general and philosophical preoccupations with life and death into the private and egotistic concerns of Ros and Guil, where the only death that really matters, is their own.

Unlike his contemporary conterparts, Hamlet, the hero of inaction par excellence, manages to satisfy his individual ethics and comes to terms with the revenge code imposed upon him; he takes his destiny and that of his country into his hands, achieving an optimistic standpoint in which things can become better, and order can be re-established. Ros and Guil, however, fail to take any action: they do not save Hamlet by chosing not to deliver the letter, even after they read its content (RG 82), neither do they try to save themselves when they realize the letters had been changed and they are sentenced to death:

> GUIL: A letter - yes - that's true. That's something ... a letter ... (*reads*). "As England is Denmark's faithful tributary ... as love between them like the palm might flourish, etcetera ... that on the knowing of this contents, without delay of any kind, should those bearers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, put to sudden death ____" (RG 92)

The fact that they read both the first letter, in which Hamlet is sentenced, and the second where they are sentenced, represents their chance of taking destiny into their own hands. However, even though they are offered this possibility, they refuse to act, remaining passive spectators of their own lives.

Dramatically speaking, Shakespeare used to portray deaths in abundance: eight corpses at the end of Hamlet - Polonius's, Ophelia's, Rosencrantz's, Guildenstern's, Laertes's, Gerturde's, Claudius's and Hamlet's. Death is enacted in all sorts of ways: poisoning, stabbing, drowning, executing. This abundancy of deaths is parodied by Stoppard in the Player's speech: "A slaughter house -eight corpses all told. It brings out the best in us".(RG 62). However, in terms of the enactment of death, he opts for clean, bloodless, metatheatrical deaths. In the last scene, he presents us with a 'tableau' of death rather than its enactment, the characters disappearing as the light fades out. (RG 96)

In parodying Godot, Stoppard also defamiliarizes the play to some extent. Ros and Guil's universe is almost the same as that of Didi and Gogo, except for the fact that they do not live on the Christian hope of being rescued; what keeps them going, instead, is their very theatrical nature: 'the show must go on', as the Broadway motto says, whether that means waiting for Godot, for the Hamlet plot, or for instructions from the director.

In Beckett's Godot death is also an important theme. In a sterile atmosphere two tramps constantly think of suicide as a way out of their boring and pointless existence. From the beginning of the play, the two characters pose the question of death - "You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones"(WG 9)-, of suicide - "hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower"(WG 10)-, and of salvation, as we see in the following passage:

ESTRAGON: What's this all about? Abused who?
VLADIMIR: The Saviour.
ESTRAGON: Why?
VLADIMIR: Because he wouldn't save them.
ESTRAGON: From hell?
VLADIMIR: Imbecile!From death.
ESTRAGON: I thought you said hell.
VLADIMIR: From death,from death. (WG 13)

Later on in the play, the two characters talk about committing suicide,and from their conversation we gather that they thought about it repeated times. Didi confesses, "I'm tired of breathing"(WG 76). In fact, one of the longest speeches of the play alludes to death: the brevity of life is emphasized in the image of the gravedigger using the forceps, suggesting that intimations of death are present from the very moment of birth:

VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping, while others were suffering? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow,when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of the night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (...) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. (*Pause*) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. (...) (WG 90)

Much in the same way that the hidden question for Didi and Gogo is the universal question of death (for one of the possible interpretations of what Godot means is death), the ultimate destiny of man also haunts Ros and Guil. During the three acts, Ros and Guil discuss mortality many times, with less or greater seriousness. In Act I, the main reference to death is the comic pseudo-scientific Beckettian

dialogue, based on misunderstandings and language games, in which they touch upon the subject of death (RG 13). Another more veiled reference to death is presented in the characters' parodying of Hamlet's soliloquy - 'to be or not to be'- in which the Prince contemplates suicide. Ros and Guil, somewhat like Prufrock and his eternal never fully formulated question,refer, in this first act and throughout the play, to the 'question' (RG 29).

In act two of RG the question of death is present in many instances, as for example when Ros says, "Perhaps they've all trampled each other to death in the rush"(RG 43). As the play progresses, and the character's end is nearer, death, like "a whisper in their skulls"[2], becomes a more constant theme, treated with much more seriousness. At a certain point, when philosophically contemplating the future, Ros considers the hypothesis of choosing to lie in a box dead or alive. He thinks "life in a box is better than no life at all" (RG 52), since at least one would have the chance of being rescued. In this sense, Ros affirms life. However, one minute later, he paradoxically contemplates the idea of eternity and concludes it is 'a terrible thought'. Death is for Ros a paradox, which he tries to resolve without much success:

> ROS: (...) Whatever became of the moment when one first knew about death? There must have been one, a moment, in childhood when it first occured to you that you don't go on for ever. It must have been shattering - stamped into one's memory. And yet I can't remember it. It never occured to me at all. What does one make of that? We must be born with an intuition of mortality. Before we know the words for it, before we know that there are words, out we come, bloodied and squalling with the

> knowledge that for all the compasses in the world, there's only one direction, and time is its only measure. (RG 53)

In RG Act III, the seriousness in treating the question of death is maintained, for the two characters are approaching their tragic fate, and the play is getting to an end. Death haunts the whole act; 'we're finished', the characters repeat many times (RG 73; 79). The motif of death allows Stoppard to reflect, at the same time, on the existential implications of death, as well as on the nature of the theatre. Stoppard debates the several visions of death - those implied in Hamlet, the ones voiced by Guil and the Player.

Ros and Guil take a more existential stance to examine death. The fear of death prevents them from living and thus, their life becomes a kind of death in life, as the play's title indicates. The Player, on the other hand, takes a metatheatrical standpoint; death for him means performance which can be enacted in several ways; in his view, though one cannot escape death, at least, one can choose how to die, which reflects the way one lived: heroically, like Hamlet, or "comically, ironically, slowly, suddenly, disgustingly, charmingly, or from a great height." (RG 63) Implied in this theatrical conception of death lies the assumption that death reflects a **modus vivendi**; although it is inevitable, what matters is **how** you die.

Guil argues with the Player about the essence of death, and the possibility of acting death. He holds that death cannnot be acted, while the Player says that that is what they perform best, for the illusion of

death is more powerful than death in real life, exemplifying this point with the story that once he had permission to enact a real death on stage,but it turned out to be a very unsatisfactory performance for the audience:

> GUIL: Actors! The mechanics of cheap melodrama! That isn't *death*! (*More quietly*) You scream and choke and sink to your knees, but it doesn't bring death home to anyone - it doesn't catch them unawares and start the whisper in their skulls that says - "One day you are going to die" (He *straightens up*). You die so many times; how can you expect them to believe in your death?
>
> PLAYER: On the contrary, it's the only kind they do believe. They're conditioned to it. I had an actor once who was condemned to hang for stealing a sheep - or a lamb, I forget which - so I got permission to have him hanged in the middle of a play - had to change the plot a bit but I thought it would be effective, you know - and you wouldn't believe it, he just *wasn't* convincing! It was impossible to suspend one's disbelief - and what with the audience jeering and throwing peanuts , the whole thing was a disaster! - he did nothing but cry all the tim : - right out of character - just stood there and cried ... Never again. (RG 63-4)

While the Player asserts the power of illusion over reality, Guil holds the opposite view, that reality cannot be rendered through illusion, that the ultimate reality of human beings - death - cannot be represented, but only lived. Enraged at the Player, Guil tries to prove his point and 'kills' him:

> GUIL (*fear, vengeance, scorn*): Your experience? - Actors! (*He snatches a dagger from the PLAYER's belt and holds the point at the PLAYER's throat: the PLAYER backs and GUIL advances, speaking more quietly,*) I'm talking about death - and you've never experienced *that.* And you cannot act it. You die a thousand of casual deaths - with none of that intensity which squeezes out life ... and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even when you die, you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after death -

> there is no applause - there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's death - (*And he pushes the blade in up to the hilt. The PLAYER stands with huge, terrible eyes, clutches at the wound as the blade withdraws: he makes small weeping sounds and falls to his knees, and then right down:) (while he is dying, GUIL, nervous, high,almost hysterical, wheels on the TRAGEDIANS*) If we have a destiny, then so had he - and if this is ours, then that was his - and if there are no explanations for us, let there be none for him - none for him - (RG 93)

Guil has used a retractable knife, a stage property, to 'kill' the Player. Yet, since he and Ros do not know it, they are completely taken in by the Player's performance, and thus, surprised when he gets up, and the tragedians applaud him. Instead of Guil proving the point that death cannot be acted, what happens is that the Player proves that death can, in fact, be acted if only the audience is willing to believe, if death is "what is expected" (RG 94).

By comparing the Player's and Guil's speeches, it becomes clear that death is, for the former, a performance, that can be repeated over and over again, and for the latter, a reality beyond the stage:

> PLAYER: (*activated, arms spread, the professional*). Deaths for all ages and occasions! Deaths by suspension, convulsion, consumption, incision, execution, asphyxiation and malnutrition! Climatic carnage, by poison and by steel! Double deaths by duel ! - Show! (RG 94)

> GUIL (*tired, drained, but still an edge of impatience, over the mime*): No ... no ... not for us, not like that. Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which soon will be over... Death is not anything ... death is not ...It's the absence of presence, nothing more... the endless time of never coming back ... a gap you can't see,and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound ... (RG 95)

Yet, on the whole, Guil's view on death is very contradictory, for in one instance, he holds that death cannot be acted, and in another, he defines death in terms of the theatre, as a 'failing to reappear', which is precisely death in a theatrical performance:

> GUIL: No, no, no ...you've got it all wrong ...you can't act death. The *fact* of it is nothing to do with seeing it happen - it's not gasps and blood and falling about - that isn't what makes it death. It's just a man failing to reappear, that's all - now you see him, now you don't that's the only thing that's real; here one minute and gone the next and never coming back - an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance gathering weight as it goes on, until, finally, it is heavy with death. (RG 64)

Thus, to a certain extent, Guil's vision of death conforms with the Player's: if death cannot be acted, yet it is like the experience of being on stage and failing to reappear. The Player's equation of life and theatre is more powerful than Guil's view; for him, the meaning of life lies in acting. Thus, when Ros and Guil leave the actors performing to nobody, they experience utmost humiliation:

> PLAYER: You don't understand the humiliation of it - to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable - that someone is watching . (...) (RG 46)

In the Player's view, the fear of death, which haunts Ros and Guil throughout the play, is, in fact, easily overcome by art; art is a means for men to surpass the fear of old age and death, and achieve immortality:

PLAYER: (..) Do you know what happens to old actors?
ROS: What?
PLAYER: Nothing. They're still acting . (...) (RG 87)

By reworking the theme of death in a metatheatrical context, RG achieves the status of a postmodern text. As Brian McHALE postulates, death in postmodern writing does not so much mark the limits of the representation - by starting off the action or bringing them to an end - but is the very object of representation. In other words, in postmodermism, there is an equation of life to discourse and death to silence:

> Postmodernist writing models or simulates death; it produces simulacra of death through the confrontation between worlds, through transgressions of ontological levels or boundaries, or through vacillation between different kinds of 'reality'.[5]

The theme of death becomes, thus, 'the objective correlative'[6] of the writing process: writing is a form of evasion of death. In exploring death in a metatheatrical context, Stoppard makes the correlation between death and writing, which, in postmodern literature, is thrust into the foreground.

In the construction of paradoxical spaces, in the Chinese-boxes or framing structure, in playing different types of reality against each other, in the metalepsis operated by the characters, in discussing the real versus the fictional, Stoppard promotes the transgression of

ontological boundaries, which stands for an allegory of the threshold between life and death:

> In a sense, every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death; so foregrounding ontological boundaries is a means of foregrouding death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way.[7]

By letting Ros and Guil, and by extension the audience, confront a dumb-show in which the spies die (RG 62-64), Stoppard lets them envisage their own deaths. Likewise, he lets the Player enact, and thus, rehearse his own death (RG 93-94). Moreover, by portraying death metatheatrically, "Now you see me, now you ____" (RG 96), he turns his play into an exercise of **ars moriendi**. This is precisely what McHALE considers the scope of postmodernism, to enable us 'to experiment with imagining our own deaths, to rehearse our own deaths':

> We have all but lost the *ars moriendi*; we no longer have anyone teach us how to die well, or at least no one we can trust or take seriously. Postmodernist writing may be our last resource for preparing ourselves, in imagination, for the single act which we must assuredly all perform unaided, with no hope of doing it over if we get it wrong the first time.[8]

Like his metatheatrical characters, who had the chance of re-appearing onstage by trying to fill out the original Hamlet plot, Stoppard, too, conquers death. He employs the theatre as the space where several texts, authors and characters are recreated. His play,

by overvaluing and depending on metatheatricality, exists as long as it feeds on other plays, as long as it borrows characters and mixes themes, as long as the world of the stage permits it. The play-life metaphor, developed throughout Hamlet, becomes the core of RG: the relationship between actors and audience, the self-consciousness of the characters who play roles, the use of the play-within-the play, which have been examined in the previous chapters, as well as the suggestion of the stage as a physical space, and as a place where man can overcome the fear of death, surveyed in the present chapter, contribute to the creation of this special zone called metatheatre where the play develops. Not solely in Elsinore, not solely in the twentieth century, but in the metatheatrical space created by the comings and goings between these two universes, which is only possible because we are in a theatre.

NOTES :

[1]McHALE, B. Postmodernist Ficiton. London, Methuen, 1987, p.221

[2]Stoppard alludes to a line of Eliot's poem "The Whispers of Imortality" which reads, "Webster was much possessed by death and saw the skull beneath the skin". In: ALLISON et alli, eds. The Norton Anthology of Poetry. New York, 1975. p. 1031-1032.); conversely, Guil comments in RG "start the whisper in their skulls that says- "One day you are going to die,(...)."(RG 63).

[3]There are some other instances in RG where the consciousness of the theatre as a physical space is evident. Guil comments "on the wind of a windless day" (RG 13) which is a contradiction in terms and can only be explained by the fact that they are in a theatre. Another similar reference occurs when the Player points to the upstage saying "Entrances there and there"(RG 25).

[4]McHALE, p.121

[5]McHALE, p. 232

[6]The concept of the "objective correlative" is developed by T.S. Eliot: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." (See ELIOT, T.S. Hamlet and his Problems. In: ___. The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism. London, Methuen, 1960. p.100)

[7]McHALE, p. 231

[8]McHALE, p.232

6 STOPPARD'S REVISION OF THE CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS OF HIS TIME IN ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENTERN ARE DEAD

And indeed there will be time (...)
There will be time to murder and create,
(...)
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.
(T. S. Eliot)

Stoppard's worldvision is complex and difficult to trace because it is built on the juxtaposition of two opposed worlds: Shakespeare's and Beckett's. By making these two forces underlying his play overlap, he achieves a parodoxical coexistence which results in the creation of a heterotopian zone: the universe of RG, a space capable of accommodating mutually exclusive worlds - the tragic world of Hamlet and the tragicomic world of Godot.

The comparison of the worldvisions of Shakespeare's and Beckett's texts is crucial, since Stoppard constructs his worldview indirectly and ironically, by questioning, transforming and revalidating different established viewpoints apparent in two of the most controversial plays which have by now acquired myhtical status. In other words, through parody and deconstruction, he celebrates the cultural forms which constitute the skeleton of his work, expressing his own view in the tension between the worlds and values of

Shakespeare and Beckett, as well as of other writers, and in the relevancy of these universes to a contemporary audience.

In reworking the plot of Hamlet, and interweaving it with echoes from Godot, in privileging some elements and ignoring others, Stoppard interprets and, to a certain extent, rewrites both plays. Revealing an exceptional awareness of the canonical texts of Western tradition, he self-consciously explores the gulf between Shakespeare's and Beckett's worlds, asserting the importance of both authors to contemporary writing.

Though there are many similarities and divergences among the Shakespearean, the Beckettian and the emergent Stoppardian worldviews, I will basically concentrate on the concepts of human nature and the perfectibility of man, as well as on the role of free will, fate and divine providence in shaping man's life. In doing so, I intend to show how RG subverts the literature of the past by employing the Shakespearean and the Beckettian worldviews as intertexts for the construction of Stoppard's alternative vision.

6.1. THE SUBVERSION OF THE CONCEPT OF ORDER AND THE PLACE OF MAN IN *HAMLET*

Thus is man that great and true amphibium whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in diverse elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds.
(Sir Thomas Browne)

Let me be nothing if within the compass of myself I do not find the battle of Lepanto - passion against reason, reason against faith, faith against the Devil, and my conscience against all.
(Sir Thomas Browne).

In analysing Shakespeare's ouevre, Ted Hughes employs the image of a torture chamber in which contradictory concepts are endlessly played against each other. As a Renaissance man, Shakespeare inherits medieval concepts - such as the theory of the Great Chain of Being and the analogical order of the universe - but, at the same time, he questions these very concepts, emerging as a great amalgamator of proliferating and seemingly incompatible views. In the same way that life cannot be reduced to any treatise of any one philosophy, neither can Shakespeare's worldview be attached to absolute systems of thought. Rather, in absorbing multiple and conflicting beliefs which coexist in the Elizabethan Age, Shakespeare offers a mirror to the world; according to Northrop FRYE, Hamlet is the play which most raises questions in the whole history of literature.[1] Stoppard, in his turn, said it is "the most famous play in any language, (...) part of a sort of common mythology."[2]

The Age of Shakespeare is, thus, a transitional one: on the one hand, it inherits the medieval order centered on God and its implicit idea of subordination which ruled families, corporations, the Church and the state; on the other, it is marked by a new scientificism and a humanistic concern with the individual, which consequently leads to reevaluations in the philosophical, theological, political and social orders.[3] J. BRIGGS puts side by side the comparative political stability of the period and the constant threats, caused by famine, plague and unemployment. Likewise, in terms of religiosity and social order, there is a hierarchical and centralized authority, on the one hand, and the reformers' and humanists' new ideas on the other. BRIGGS writes:

> The widening of horizons, both geographical and intellectual, and the shaking of older convictions, produced a complex blend of optimism and pessimism, credulity and doubt, as well as the beginning of that sense of the relative which is so characteristic a part of modern consciousness.[4]

It seems to me, that it is precisely the power of Shakespeare's Hamlet, through its interrogative nature, ironies and ambivalences, to condense and illustrate these numerous tendencies, which attracted Stoppard to elect the play as a kind of precursor of modernity.

The medieval man conceives the universe as a perfect and finite circle with a motionless and small planet - the earth - at its centre. Around the earth, transparent spheres - the planets - move at different speeds. The tenth sphere - Primum Mobile or the First Mover

- is a metaphor for God. Beyond it, lies the void where neither time nor space regulate.[5]

The principle of analogy 'as above, so below' and its logical deduction 'so below, as above' - announced in the Smaragdine Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus[6] - organizes this universe in terms of correspondences and hierarchies between the macro-micro cosmos. For instance, the idea of a ruling God is reflected in the conception of the divine right of the kings. In fact, the place of all elements - God, man, the most abject beings, plants and minerals - is determined by the graded hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being.[7]

Instead of subscribing to this medieval view, Shakespeare subverts it and offers a different version of the concept of chaining and gradation; in Hamlet the mocking-parodic equation of the beggar and the worm inverts perspectives and plays with the prevailing idea of the Chain from a scientific, or rather, a pessimistic and naturalistic version of the cycle of life:

> HAMLET: (...) Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that's the end.
> CLAUDIUS: Alas, alas.
> HAMLET: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
> CLAUDIUS: What dost thou mean by this?
> HAMLET: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (Ham 4.3.20-29)

Throughout the play, Hamlet inexhaustively reexamines the place of man between the animal and the godly worlds, as if doubting that the Chain can in fact account for human nature. He calls attention to the bestiality of human action, apparent in Gertrude's incestuous marriage and Claudius fratricide:

> HAMLET (...) So excellent a King that was to this
> Hyperion to a satyr
> (...)
> A little month, or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor's father's body
> Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she -
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourned longer - married with my uncle
> My father's brother, but no more like my father
> Than I to Hercules
> (...)
> Oh most wicked speed, to post
> With such dexterity to incestuous sheets. (Ham 1.2.139-157)

The established place of man, between God and the beasts, which defines human nature for the medieval mind, haunts Hamlet who is "painfully aware of the baffling predicament between the glory of having been made in God's image, and the incrimination of being descended from fallen Adam".[8] The purpose of human action and existence is pessimistically questioned:

> HAMLET: Get thee to a nunnery - why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. (...) (Ham 3.1.120-125)

Thus, in Shakespeare man no longer occupies an unquestionable position in the Chain of Being[9]; human nature is more complex than the medieval scholar thought it to be; man's limits are not given by his central place in the Chain, but pertain to his conscience, to the knowledge of who he is and what awaits for him. The gap between what one says and what one does, illustrated by Hamlet's advice to the actors, "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (Ham 3.2.15-16), the increasing conscience of moral conflicts and the sense of the individual's new roles, force man to reevaluate old certainties about his position in the universe.

It becomes apparent that from the early humanists, Shakespeare learns the glorification of man and the confidence in his abilities and powers. From late Renaissance, especially the work of the Reformists, Shakespeare acquires a more sceptical view, pessimistic and relativistic, doubting man's capacity to accomplish anything on his own. It is precisely in this latter view that Shakespeare comes closer to Montaigne.

The portrayal of human nature in Hamlet owes a great deal to Montaigne's Essais, which were widely read in England at the time.[10] Emerging in the context of the Renaissance problem of the noble savage, Montaigne's thought lies behind its epistemological crisis. BRIGGS writes that

> Montagine's work as a whole, and in particular his comprehensive attack on man's presumptuous ignorance, remained unparalleled; yet in its general sensibility - its sense of searching rather than finding, its awareness of the instability of personality and of the relative partial

> and transitory nature of opinion - his outlook closely resembles that of much late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.[11]

For MONTAIGNE the world is always moving, and things are always changing; this makes it impossible to have conclusive and absolute judgements about the world; one can form only partial, momentary, sometimes contradictory points of view :

> (...) the world eternally turns round: all things therein are incessantly moving, the earth, the rocks of Caucasus, the Pyramids of Egypt, both by the public motion and their own. Even constancy itself is no other but a slower and more languishing motion. I cannot fix my object; 'tis always tottering and reeling by a natural giddeness: I take it as it is at the instant I consider it: I do not paint its being, I paint its passage; not a passing from one age to another, or, as people say, from seven to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must accommodate my history to the hour: I may presently change, not only by fortune, but also by intention. (...) So it is, that I may peradventure contradict myself, but, as Desmades said, I never contradict the truth. (Essais, III.ii - "Of Repentance", p.388)

Moreover, man's inclinations and actions, his very identity, are also subjected to change, as MONTAIGNE writes:

> I can more hardly believe a man's constancy than any other virtue, and believe nothing sooner than the contrary. (...) Our ordinary practice is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, be it to the left or to the right, upwards or downwards, according as we are wafted by the breath of occasion. (...) We do not go, we are driven; like things that float, now leisurely then with violence, according to the gentleness or rapidity of the current. (...) We fluctuate betwixt various inclinations; we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly. (Essais, II.i - "Of The Inconstancy Of Our Actions", p.159-60)

Because of the inconstancy of his very nature, man no longer occupies a safe and indisputable place in God's universe. Paradoxically, MONTAIGNE expresses both pity for the human condition and scorn for man's presumptuousness:

> Alas, *poor man! thou hast enough inconveniences* that are inevitable, without increasing them by thine own invention; and art miserable enough by nature, without being so by art; thou has real and essential deformities enough, without being forging those that are imaginary. (Essais III.v - "Upon some verses of Virigil", p.426)

> Can anything be imagined to be so ridiculous that this miserable and wretched creature, who is not so much as master of himself, but subject to the injuries of all things, should call himself master and emperor of the world, of which he has not power to know the least part, much less to command it. (...) Presumption is our natural and original disease. The most wretched and frail of all creatures is man, and withal the proudest. (Essais II.xii. - "Apology for Raimond De Sebonde", p. 213-16)

Moreover, his relativistic view shatters the priviledged status of man in the Chain of Being, and questions his place above the animals and his closeness to the deity, as the following quote from the Essais shows:

> Man (in good earnest) is a marvellous vain, fickle, and unstable subject, and on whom it is very hard to form any certain and uniform judgement. (Essais I.i. - "That Men By Various Ways Arrive At The Same End", p.4)

Like Montaigne, Shakespeare also doubts the power of the senses to judge the self or reality. For both writers, there is a gulf separating

outward behaviour and inner character; man is, thus, an actor who wears masks, costumes and paintings which do not mirror his inside:

> We are all lumps, and of so various and inform a contexture, that every piece plays, every moment, its own game, and there is as much difference betwixt us and ourselves as betwixt us and others (...) (Essais II.i - "Of The Inconstancy Of Our Actions", p. 162)

> HAMLET: I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another.(...) (Ham 3.1.136-137)

> HAMLET: Seems madam! nay it is, I know not seems.
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play,
> But I have that within which passes show -
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
> (Ham 1.2.76-86)

These quotations provide evidence that Shakespeare and Montaigne hold similar views about the nature of human beings: man is contradictory and unstable as the contrast between face and mask, clothes and being, interior and exterior reveal. Moreover, both of them rework an old theme of Latin literature, that of 'theatrum mundi' or 'theatrum orbis terrarum', which stands for the conception of the world as a stage. Analysing this conception, A. RIGHTER highlights the conflict between public role and inner self:

> A sense of the futility, of the vanity or folly of human ambition is characteristic of all meditative Elizabethan comparisons of the world as a stage. Even at their most cheerful, such descriptions manage to mock the seriousness of man's pursuits, to point out the somehow ludicrous nature of his perpetual activity.12

CLEMEN[13] quotes a few passages from Montaigne's Essais which, when compared to Shakespeare's texts, clearly point to common themes between the two authors - the concept of the world as theatre and the theme of appearance versus reality. For example, the famous speech

> All the world's a stage
> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances
> And one man is his time plays many parts,
> His actions being seven ages. (Shakespeare - As You Like It 2.7.138-142)

is very similar to Montaigne's assertion that

> Most of our bussiness is farce: Mundus universus exercet histrionam. We must play our parts properly, but withal as the part of a borrowed personage, we must not make a real essence of a mask and outward appearance; nor of proper of that which is another. We cannot distinguish the skin from the shirt; 'tis enough to meal the face, without mealing the breast. (Essais III,x - "Of Managing The Will", p. 490)

In this sense, both authors can be considered as forerunners of modern concepts such as social masks and roles, the fluidity and multiple nature of the self, the relativity of truth, and the Pirandellian dialectics of illusion versus reality.[14]

Although Shakespeare can be considered a precursor of modernity in the sense that he subverts ready-made ideas and concepts, in general and formal terms, he tends to follow the path of classical tragedy which implies transcendence. In Hamlet, after the calamity a new order is achieved out of tragic disorder. Hamlet, who has been cast into the role of the avenger is the instrument through which the cosmic order will be re-established, thus, avoiding the collapse of the whole Chain of Being.

At the beginning of the play a series of strange incidents happen to indicate that the cosmic order has been disturbed, as Marcellus forewarns:

> MARCELLUS: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
> (Ham 1.4.90)

Soon after, we come to know that the disturbance is caused by a crime, which has been committed and involves the head of the state, thus, reverberating on all subjects and shattering the whole social, moral, political and religious spheres.[15] The ghost of Hamlet's father appears, revealing the nature of the crime and professing the need to eradicate evil. Hamlet, the only son of the deceased king, is cast into the role of the avenger; tragic justice implies that the hero is endowed with the responsibility to set things right again, even at the cost of his own life:

> HAMLET: (...)The time is out of joint: O cursèd spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right. (...)
> (Ham 1.5.189-190)

Even though the hero dies in the sweep of events, there is a sense of exhiliaration at the end of the play, since there is a kind of transcendence that leads to a renewal of community bonds, illustrated in Hamlet's last words, recommending Fortinbras as the next King:

> HAMLET: (...) But I do prophesy th'election lights
> On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice. (...) (Ham 5.2.335-336)

According to A.C. BRADLEY, in Shakespearean Tragedy, even though chance or accident bear some influence in the course of tragic action, yet it is the action of man that determines the tragic fate:

> That men may start a course of events but can neither calculate nor control it, is a tragic fact. (...) Any large admission of chance in the tragic sequence would certainly weaken, and might destroy the sense of the causal connection of character, deed, and catastrophe.[16]

For Bradley, thus, man is free to choose his destiny, engaging in meaningful action at opportune moments. This freedom, however, does not imply that there is no providence. The following extract illustrates the pagan idea of fate inherited from the Greeks:

> HAMLET: My fate cries out
> And makes each petty artery in this body
> As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
> Still am I called (...) (Ham 1.5.82-85)

Likewise, the pagan idea of the Wheel of Time or Fortune's Wheel is present in Rosencrantz's deeply ironical speech about the consequences of the fall of a king on the moral order of the state and its subjects:

> ROSENCRANTZ: (...) That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
> The Lives of many. The cease of majesty
> Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw,
> What's nearer it with it. It is a massy wheel
> Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
> To those huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls,
> Each small annexment, petty consequence,
> Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
> Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.
> (Ham 3.3.14-23)

The ideas of fate and the Wheel of Time, responsible for the fall of kings and yeomen, which relate to the Great Chain of Being, are reintrepreted under a Christian light and subordinated to God's laws. The belief in providence as the organizing force which absorbs these pagan ideas is evident when Hamlet proclaims:

> HAMLET: (...)There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will - (Ham 5.2.10-11)

The idea of taking action, i.e., responsibility for one's own life is central to Maynard MACK's view of Hamlet as a tragic hero. Hamlet must not only accept human condition in a rotten world but, moreover, he must act within human limits: he has to accept this world and the limits in which human existence, action and judgement are enclosed;

has has to learn the limits of human comprehension and reason; he has has to accept "the world as a duel in which whether we know it or not, evil holds the poisoned rapier and the poisoned chalice waits; in which if we win at all, it costs no less than everything."[17] In fact, behind this acceptance of what life may bring to man, there lies the medieval theory of retribution which holds that the good are recompensed, the wicked are punished and sometimes a good man must be sacrificed for the general welfare.

Divine providence regulates man's actions and his fate. Hamlet's experiences cause him to accept the idea of providence with full conviction. Hamlet comes to terms with himself when he realizes that more than seeking personal revenge, he must be the instrument to exact universal justice. He places himself in the hands of providence:

> HAMLET: Not a whit, we defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come - the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be. (Ham 5.2.191-195)

All events have a providential nature which man must learn to accept: every event, down to the fall of a sparrow, has been determined by providence. One will die whenever and only when it has been appointed. Man must achieve proper readiness to endure what may come.

The Shakespearean worldview, rather than presenting a unified and unproblematic vision, portrays the whole spectrum of religious,

philosophical and political attitudes current Shakespeare's time. The playwright raises the issues and conflicts of the Renaissance Age, an age of doubt, of strong beliefs and emerging scepticism, where new ideas about human nature, cosmology and religion are confronted with each other.

These new ideas and values are brought under the medieval moral order which is somehow too tight to hold them. For example, in Hamlet the several conceptions of human nature - man as God's image, man as beast, and man as actor - and the Christian and pagan doctrines exist side by side. It is precisely the conflict and the tension created between the medieval religiosity and the values of the humanistic revival of Greek and Roman texts which permits the rebirth of tragedy in Elizabethan England. The structure of classical tragedy somehow is able to accommmodate this kaleidoscope of opposing ideas into a coherent and meaningful pattern which permits their questioning from within.

In interrogating medieval world conceptions, the nature of man and the relationship between art and life, Shakespeare subverts the myths of his own time and deals with issues still unsolved. Hamlet, in his indecisions and deep philosophical considerations, in his language games, in his tendency to generalize about the nature of humankind, to weigh good and evil, to muse on suicide, death and the existence of a life after death, and in his praising of the actors and the stage condenses all the metaphysical questionings of his age, surpassing his own time.

In watching Hamlet, more than a man in action, we witness a man in pain, a man who suffers "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and takes arm agaisnt a sea of uncertianties" (Ham 3.1.51-60), weighing the rights and wrongs of this world and of his own personal responsibility and conscience. This man, unsure of values, rules, religion, unsure of his place and duty in a stale, flat and weary universe (Ham 1.2.133-135) is no other but our own selves eternally questioning who we are, what we are here for, what lies beyond our earthly existence.

The questioning of basic human assumptions, the portrayal of a plurality of truths, the ability to synthetize opposing experiences, the tendency towards doubt and ambivalence, the refusal to ignore contrary evidences, as well as the sense of literature as a game which plays out these contradictory perceptions, is what makes Shakespeare, along with most Elizabethan writers, so enduringly important. It is this complexity that Stoppard tries to retain when he holds contradictory visions intertwined in RG.

In bringing Hamlet back to the stage and in contraposing it to the world of his twentieth century Ros and Guil, Stoppard reminds us of the universality of the play, and its pregnancy to our twentieth century world. It is the play's pertinency and its shadow over our own world which has invited Stoppard to re-tell this tale from another entrance, that of the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who will become Ros and Guil.

6.2. THE SUBVERSION OF BASIC REALITIES IN BECKETT'S OUEVRE

> *One has to face the fact that man is a failure. His conscience, which belongs to the spirit, will probably never be brought into harmony with his nature, his reality, his social, and there will always be 'honourable sleeplessness' for those who for some unfathomable reason feel responsible for human fate and life.*
> *(Thomas Mann)*

In the same way as Hamlet has become a myth of the exploration of the basic existential question - what does it mean to be? -, Godot can be read as our modern archetypal myth[18]: Valdimir and Estragon represent humanity and their endless waiting stands for the human plight. In the following pages, I aim at tracing Beckett's worldvision as expressed mainly in Godot with a few examples from The Trilogy, in order to establish a ground of comparison with the Shakespearean worldvision delineated in the previous section. These two contrasting universes serve as intertexts for the construction of Stoppard's alternative worldvision in RG.

In an article in the Sunday Times, Stoppard acknowledges his debt to Beckett:

> (...) Of course it would be absurd to deny my enormous debt to it (Godot), and love for it. To me the representative attitude is "I am a human nothing". Beckett qualifies as he goes along. He picks up a proposition and then dismantles each pat of its structure as he goes along until he nullifies what he started out with. Beckett gives me more pleasure than I can express because he always ends up with a man surrounded by the wreckage of a proposition he had made in confidence two minutes before.[19]

In general terms, Beckett's position is determined by the atmosphere of a period of crisis. The threat of the cold war, the destruction of the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima, the need for man to revise values, to question tradition, to rebuild cities and life, marked the writers of the time, who were, like the rest of the population in Europe, starting from scratch. The previous ways of representing reality, on the page and on the stage, did not correspond to the unbearable suffering man had been confronted, nor to his feelings of vulnerability in a world he could not control.

Thus, in his plays and novels, Beckett questions the validity of traditional representations of reality; moreover, he reexamines the basic foundations of identity, time, meaning and the possibility of communication. By portraying the anguish and the misery two world wars have made humanity witness and suffer, he depicts the cruelty and horror as not only pertaining to the rules and values of society, but also to the very human soul.

What Beckett suggests is that we should not take reality for granted - we should be sceptical about what people generally assume reality to be. In the metatheatrical realm, this scepticism takes the form of a suspicion of the efficacy of the theatrical conventions available to the playwright to represent reality. Thus, for example, the bare scenery in Godot invites a reflection upon the reality of real life as well as the reality of the stage: it stands for Beckett's refusal of the realistic as well as the symbolic representation of reality, as it is reality abstracted from its common objects and representations; its

nakedness reveals the artificiality of the theatrical conventions and, moreover, the artificiality of our own lives.

According to Aristotle, a traditional play, defines itself as the representation of an action. In Godot, the action is reduced to a pantomine: the relations between the characters do not develop; characters are clownish figures, who gesticulate and repeat dialogues and situations; time is circular. The play invests against the Scribean formula of exposition, rising action, turning point, climax, and dènouement, becoming, to a certain extent, an antitheatre employing anti-conventional temporality.

The superficial realism of the traditional plays and novels is, thus, challenged by this new drama and new prose style, which deconstruct novelistic and dramatic conventions. The lack of a chronological plot, of apparent logic, of well-defined theme and characters, is Beckett's answer to the new and painful perception that our representations of ourselves and our society have proved short-sighted, as the following extracts illustrate:

> (...) I had forgotten who I was (excusably) and spoken of myself as I would have of another, if I had been compelled to speak of another. Yes, it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I forget who I am and strut before my eyes like a stranger. (M 40)

> And I am quite willing to go on thinking of her as an old woman, widowed and withered, and of Ruth as another, nor she to speak of her defunct husband of his inability to satisfy her legimate cravings. And there were days, like this evening, when my memory confuses them and I am tempted to think of them as one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life. And God forgive me to tell you the horrible truth, my mother's image sometimes mingles with theirs,

> which is literally unendurable, like being crucified, I don't know why and I don't want to. (M 55)

The world the characters inhabit is shapeless, restricted, and arbitrary. By selecting only a few human experiences, some outrageous, some bizarre, Beckett forces us to reflect upon our solitude, our boredom, our endless routines, our anguishes, our lack of communication:

> (...) one of those stray dogs that you pick up and take in your arms, from compassion or because you have long been straying with no other company than the endless roads, sands, shingle, bogs and heather, (...) (M 13)

> But I can do nothing, that is what they seem to forget at each instant. I can't rejoice and I can't grieve, it's in vain they explained to me how it's done, I never understand. (U 324)

Likewise in Godot, by making the play oscillate between despair and solitude, by alternating profound silences and thoughts of suicide, Beckett frustrates our expectancies of a well-made play, in which things make sense; he forces us re-examine the relationship between reality and art, life and literature. For him, life is both tragic and comic: it is unpredictable, the logical and the illogical coexisting side by side.

In fact, he did not give Godot the subtitle 'a tragicomedy' by accident. Acording to R. DUTTON, when Beckett employed the term tragicomedy, he was aligning Godot with the late Renaissance tradition,

particularly late Shakespearean plays.[20] J.L. STYAN in The Dark Comedy states that this mixture of the tragic and the comic has always existed in the history of drama, from the time of Euripedes, to the England of Shakespeare and the France of Molière; however, it is only in our century that it has reached its fullest expression, with Pirandello, Chekhov and Beckett.

STYAN holds that tragedy, in its classical sense, is missing today[21], for it belonged to a world where religion was at the basis of the affirmation in human greatness, where the belief in the perfectibility of man existed in a society that shared moral values. The sense of religiousness is substituted, in our times, by a moral indifference that gives rise to the flourishing of tragicomedy, which is not a simple sum of comedy plus tragedy, but their synthesis into a new genre.

Vivien MERCIER has defined Godot as a play in which "nothing happens twice"[22]. The two acts have a similar structure, and the motifs repeat themselves: two tramps, for two days wait for a mysterious Godot, who twice does not come; their waiting is twice interrupted by the arrival of a messenger, and twice by the coming of Pozzo and Lucky. The circularity of the two acts, and the repeated motif of two, imply that this universe is of a cyclical nature, an idea that is enhanced by the the indication of time through the seasons - the leaves on the tree. Time imposes itself in the endless repetition of the same encounters, the same dialogues and the same pattern of

behaviour, evident in one of the character's remark, "the same lot as usual"(WG 9).

In the world of Godot, time is a heavy load which slowly passes without teaching the characters anything. Vladimir speaks of 'a million years ago', the time when he and Estragon were still presentable and could be let up in the Eiffel Tower, where they should have ended their lives by jumping (WG 10). This extreme pessimism is found throughout the play and also in Beckett's novels. Life, in his universe, is a brief moment between birth and death:

> Then I might escape being gnawed to death as by an old satiated rat, and by little tester-bed along with me, a cradle, or be gnawed to death not so fast, in my old cradle (...) (U 277)

> POZZO: (...) one day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*calmer*) They give you birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (WG 89)

The cradle and the forceps images of the above quotations condense the moment of birth and of death: life is short and intolerable, and death is the only certainty we have. Within this nihilistic philosophy, the tragic belief in the perfectibility of man has no place. As I have mentioned before, this belief, even though questioned in Hamlet, is reasserted in the end of the tragedy, when the hero comes to terms with his fate and his conscience. In Beckett's

universe, the idea of perfectibility is completely shattered: with the passing of time, the characters do not grow wiser, they only grow older. In other words, the human condition only gets worse and worse: Pozzo goes blind and Lucky goes deaf. The characters' physical decrepitude becomes a metaphor for a miserable human conditon, as the following example shows:

> I, of whom I know nothing, I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the (...) My spine is not supported. (...). I see nothing. (...) I'm a big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, (...) . (U 279-280)

Unlike the Shakespearean universe, in Beckett's world there is no order to be reestablished for there is no universal law in the first place; this world is one of disorder, of perpetual waiting, where no rules regulate, and no explanations are offered. In Godot, the single and feeble hope for salvation - that Godot will come and free the tramps from the pain of living - never actually happens. Beckett's universe, though dense with theological references, is one that has incorporated Nietzsche's aphorism 'God is dead'. Beckett never asserts the truth of the sentence, though, leaving the possibility open: Godot may or may not come, just as God may or may not exist. The human plight is to wait; however, even if indeed Godot existed, what matters is that he lets the two tramps rotten in perpetual waiting.

Beckett's world is, thus, a godless one, which paradoxically holds on to the possibility of salvation, and of a life beyond this barren world without absolute truths or points of reference. As we see in the following passage, the traditional representation of God as being an old man with a white beard mouthed by Vadimir hints at the irony of the situation, since it becomes evident that, for Vladimir there would be no purpose in living, if Godot did not exist, as Godot is what he relies on to make life bearable:

> VLADIMIR: Has he a beard,Mr Godot?
> BOY: Yes, sir.
> VLADIMIR: Fair or ...(*He hesitates*) black?
> BOY: I think it is white,sir . (WG 92)

There seems to be no providence, no godly principle guiding life in the world of Beckett. Fate refers to the condition of humanity as a whole rather than to the Greek concept of personal fate. It is chance which rules man's life, as the following passages indicate:

> VLADIMIR: Let us not waste our time in idle discourse. Let us do something while we have the chance! Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! (...) (WG 79)

> POZZO: (...) But - but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is changing and will burst upon us pop! like that! just when we least expect it. That's how it is on this bitch of an earth. (WG 38)

The second quotation portrays the sudden change from day to night, which alludes to the way in which chance may reverse the condition of man: the gentle evening is deceptive, for the blackness of night can burst upon man at any moment. The idea of a cruel human fate or condition is corroborated by that of chance operating in a malignant hostile universe. In Godot, for example, Pozzo admits that Lucky, whom he oppresses, is much more gifted than he himself, and that he has not achieved his comfortable position by personal merit, but rather, by chance:

> Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed it otherwise. To each one, his due. (WG 31)

Man's condition and changes in his condition are to a large extent, the consequence of randomness and arbitrariness rather than of man's decision. Godot opens with a character, Estragon, sitting on a mound, trying to take off his boot, saying, "Nothing to be done" (WG 9), a sentence echoed and re-echoed throughout the play. With the entrance of the second character, however, this sentence becomes ambiguious: it refers primarily to the physical and circumstantial act of taking off the boots, but also contains metaphysical as well as metatheatrical implications - nothing to be done on the stage and nothing to be done in life. 'Nothing to be done', therefore, can be read as Estragon's giving up the task of taking off his boot, and as a general statement about

life: there is nothing to be done to save us from our meaningless everyday existence.

Later on, Vladimir re-echoes this sentence by metamorphosing it into "Nothing to show" (WG 11), revealing more clearly its metatheatrical implication. 'Nothing to be done' and 'Nothing to show' refer both to the characters existing as characters on the stage, and to the existence of the human being in real life; in other words, they refer to the fact that the characters are on the stage facing an audience who is also waiting, and yet there is nothing to be done or shown - no action, no real dialogue, no conflict to be resolved, no truth to be revealed. In sum, 'Nothing to be done' self-reflexively indicates how the play, and by extension, life itself, revolve around nothingness.

Man's predicament is, thus, to wait and never do anything. To know what day is today does not make any difference, for the days are similar to one another. Pozzo's gesture of checking his watch for knowing how many years he and Lucky had been together, comically points at the quick succession of the days and years. When, once more Pozzo checks his watch, the tic-tac convinces him that time does indeed exist, even though it seems to have stopped - "Time has stopped" (WG 24) -, as the characters' dialogue implies:

> ESTRAGON: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? Or Monday? Or Friday? (WG 15)

Beckett's characters lack answers for their existential problems. Beckett's disregard for easy and prompt interpretations of the world

and of the theatre, his taste for paradoxes and his search for silence and meaninglessness lead him to overvalue ignorance rather than knowledge. The reader/ audience is, thus, led to partake the character's ignorance of who they are, where they are and what they are doing. In Godot, Didi and Gogo face ignorance in relation to their identities, to the place where they are, to when and why they should meet Godot, and to who Godot actually is. The reader/audience shares part of their ignorance, for Beckett's characters are placed beyond the knowlegde of who they are; yet they strangely aim at some day learning something about their lives. Beckett condemns his characters to an everlasting hope, which contradictorily keeps them going and prevents them from acting.

Thus, if on the one hand, Beckett believed in the fallibility of language for communicating and expressing philosophical truths, yet he was still poet enough to turn the very nothingness that language talks about into lyric poetry. As Martin ESSLIN himself has stated,

> if Beckett's plays are concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, his use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements, an instrument of thought.[23]

The multiple level of meanings with which Beckett's language operates, makes language surpass its common function of a means to express ideas. At a superficial level, Beckett's language can be considered colloquial, banal and prosaic; this apparent simplicity,

however, masks its semantic complexity. A poetry of assonances and verbal associations survives in the fragmented speeches that deconstruct the realistic and naturalistic descriptions and narrations.

In Beckett's plays, language is devalued as a means of communication and of expressing thoughts, pointing to its very limitation and disintegration; yet, paradoxically, his "continued use of language must (...) be regarded as an attempt to communicate on his own part, to communicate the incommunicable."[24] ESSLIN proposes that "Beckett's entire work can be seen as a search for the reality that lies behind mere reasoning in conceptual terms"[25]. The question of meaning is pursued at many instances: behind the idea that there is nothing to tell, lies the assumption that words are highly ambiguous. Thus, words fall beyond their expected task of expressing reality, because the only way we have to verify experience is through words, which represent an enigma requiring the act of decoding.

In sum, the world of Beckett, though more pessimistic than that of Stoppard, is part of the same épistème: the ambivalence of tone, the mixture of high and low, of tragedy and comedy, are common elements on the part of both authors. As DUTTON analyses, in both Godot and RG "everything is subsumed to the end of making sense of the strange and perplexing situation in which their main characters find themselves".[26] Many of the existential issues raised by Beckett, such as time, the impossibility of communication and expression, the emptiness and meaninglessness of life, the mutability of the self, the lack of motivation and human inconsistencies, the pain and

vulnerability of the human being will also become themes in RG, as I will try to show in the next section.

6.3. TENSION OF OPPOSITES IN ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

> *It all comes to the same thing anyway; comic and tragic are merely two aspects of the same situation and I have now reached the stage where I find it hard to distinguish one from the other. (E. Ionesco)*

In playing Hamlet - the myth of the Elizabethan age - against Godot - the myth of the modern times - Stoppard revitalizes these two moments of the history of the theatre, and promotes the confrontation of the continuities and discontinuities between the Renaissance and the modern worldviews. Building his play on the cultural tradition of the Western theatre, he offers a metatheatrical overview on the history of drama and, at the same time, indicates that our existential search for meaning in life, which started long ago, has not yet ended yet and will probably never end.

The existential preoccupations raised in Hamlet, Godot and RG bear great similarity, even though formulated in different garments. The three plays, thus, can be viewed as paradigmatic of the human plight for they deal with basic issues such as the order of the universe, the boundary between art and reality, the perfectibility of man, the idea of fate, chance and free will.

Directing the headlights to two minor Shakespearean characters , and placing Hamlet in the backstage of their lives, Stoppard approximates the attendant lords to the Beckettian anti-heroes. The great hero of Elizabethan tragedy, who undergoes illumination and upon whose decision the welfare of the whole state depends, has no place in our century. The social dimension of individual action, present in Shakespeare's universe, is absent in Stoppard, as the latter flattens the existential doubts and the ethical concerns responsible for Hamlet's inactivity, transforming them into Ros and Guil's perpetual (and metatheatrical) waiting for directions. Our heroes are just supporting characters whose inactivity is a consequence of the power structure in which they are immersed[26].

As I have sought to demonstrate in the two preceeding sections, while in Shakespeare's tragic world, meaningful action and the perfectibility of man - even if questioned at certain moments - are fundamental concepts, in Beckett's universe the futility of all human enterprise and the non-betterment of man are foremost. In Hamlet, the search for meaning and Hamlet's moral duty coincide - when Hamlet finally acts, he is giving an existential as well as a public response to the moral code of the Renaissance. In RG, as in Godot, no action is required from the characters that could redeem the world; their actions have a bearing only upon their individual existence.

The basic difference between Beckett and Stoppard, however, is that the latter gives the characters a chance to exercise free will, even if they choose not to, while the former excludes free will from his

universe, stating the nullity of human attainment, in a world where the controlling forces are unknown. Unlike the world of Shakespeare, where the characters' action is decisive, capable of influencing the shaping of events, in Beckett's world the impossibility of exercising freedom takes the forefront of the debates, freedom being an unsettled issue, as clearly expressed in Molloy:

> I never left myself, free, yes, I don't know what that means, but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of the mind. (M 14)

Stoppard makes a compromise between Shakespeare's relative free will and man's possibility to act meaningfully and the complete submission of Beckett's characters; for him, although man is an extremely limited creature - as in Beckett -, the exercise of free will and meaningful action can redeem him - as in Shakespeare. The free will that Hamlet exercises in avenging his father, the free will that Didi and Gogo show in terms of speech, but lack in relation to action[28] is present in RG, even if not to be exercised, as Ros and Guil are presented with a chance to avoid their coming death, evident in the following remark:

> ROS: Nevertheless, I suppose one might say that this was a chance ... One might well ... accost him ... Yes, it definitely looks like a chance to me .... Something on the lines of a direct informal approach ... man to man .... straight from the shoulder .... Now look here, what's is all about ... sort of thing. Yes. Yes, this looks like one to be grabbed with both hands, I should say ... if I were asked .... No point in looking at a gift horse till you see the whites of its eyes, etcetera. (...) (RG 55)

In the above quotation, Ros mentions the idea of 'chance' which corresponds to precisely what freedom means in Stoppard's universe: not absolute freedom, but a relative one, as the following passage suggest:

> GUIL: One is free on a boat. For a time. Relatively. (RG 76)

> GUIL: Free to move, speak, extemporize, and yet. We have not been cut loose. Our truancy is defined by one fixed star, and our drift represents merely a slight change of angle to it: we may seize the moment, toss it around while the moments pass, a short dash here, an exploration there, but we are brought full circle to face again the single immutable fact - that we, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, bearing a letter from one king to another are taking Hamlet to England. (RG 76)

Although Ros and Guil lack absolute freedom, since they cannot avoid death, in the same way as neither Hamlet nor Didi and Gogo could, nor any of us can, yet they are confronted with the choice of **how to live**. Life, for Stoppard, "is a gamble, at terrible odds" (RG 87), which Ros and Guil did not play, a 'bet' they "wouldn't take" (RG 87). The two attendant lords lost their 'momentum', they "move idly towards eternity, without possibility of reprieve or hope of explanation" (RG 91), they were 'told so little' and were "denied an explanation" (RG 93), a situation which is intended to reflect the human condition in the twentieth century. In the end, before they meet their death, their conscience troubles them, but they die without solving the problem:

> ROS: (...) We've nothing wrong. We didn't harm anyone. Did we? (RG 95)
>
> GUIL: Our names shouted in a certain dawn ... a message .. a summons ... there must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said - no. But somehow we missed it. (RG 95)

Stoppard lets the audience entertain the idea that his characters can exercise their free will, even though, their freedom is limited, as the boat metaphor suggests. The boat scene represents the possibility of stepping out of the Hamlet frame: in the same way as Stoppard himself rewrites a scene which is not present in Hamlet, Ros and Guil could have shaken off their sloth in rewriting the letter. By inserting this scene, Stoppard grants them with the opportunity to devise their own scripts: they could have stepped out of their Shakespearean roles, but they fail, for they cannot transcend their own banality. Like Didi and Gogo, they refuse to act and to take responsibility for their own little lives. Their deepest desire is never to have been involved in the action in the first place. The sea-voyage, a symbol for life, is their opportunity to act, which they miss, surrendering to external forces and choosing to enjoy the apparent security of a pre-determined fate.

The image of the boat, as a symbol for an enclosed life, is corroborated by the box metaphor: both suggest the possibilities of recreation within limits. Although these metaphors denote extreme limitation, as the boat and the box are enclosed spaces, yet Ros affirms that "life in a box is better than no life at all." (RG 52). Stoppard's view is, in this perspective, more optimistic than Beckett's.

Like Shakespeare, Stoppard believes in the importance of human action, if not to redeem the world, at least to redeem man's individual life.

Rather than taking action, Ros and Guil, like Didi and Gogo, wait for something or someone - some kind of explanation, some kind of event that would redeem their existence. Didi's and Gogo's endless waiting takes them nowhere; at the end of the play, they are exactly where they were in the beginning, fulfilling Eliot's Prufrockian fate, 'In my end is my beginning'. Likewise, the interminable doubts of Ros and Guil also take them nowhere, but to the fulfilment of their predicament, of their predetermined fate: Ros and Guil are **dead** as Shakespeare devised them to be.

In other words, while in Godot waiting is an existential theme, an allegory for living, in RG Stoppard adds to Beckett's pessimistic equation waiting/living a political call for action: without a commitment to action, waiting means **death in life**.

Ros and Guil's universe lacks an ordering principle. In their world, the Elizabethan order of the universe embodied in nature is not valid anymore; nature is no longer an ordered whole that can blindly be trusted; its laws have been suspended as the metaphor of the run of the eighty-nine 'heads' in a row indicates. Ros and Guil conclude that there must be, then, other ordering processes ruling their existence. They feel the responsibility of building a new equation, since unknown and uncontrollable forces are at work in shaping their lives: if, like Didi and Gogo, they do not know the rules by which the game of life is

played, yet they should not remain as passive spectators, but try to make choices, keeping away from despair. While Beckett's characters succumb to complete inaction to the point that they cannot even attempt suicide, Ros and Guil show a feeble willingness to understand reality. Unlike Beckett, and recovering the importance of the Shakespearean tragic vision of life, Stoppard emphasizes the element of choice in human existence.

At a certain point, Guil discusses the issue of chance, fate and the arbritariness of events with the Player:

> GUIL: It was chance, then?
> PLAYER: Chance?
> GUIL: You found us.
> PLAYER: Oh yes.
> GUIL: You were looking?
> PLAYER: Oh no.
> GUIL: Chance, then.
> PLAYER: Or fate. (RG 19)

By equating chance and fate, Stoppard exempts himself from answering Guil's question of whether it is chance or fate which regulates their lives. Guil's rage for explanations, evident when he exclaims "We can't afford anything quite so arbitrary (...) like two blind men looting a bazaar for their own portraits (...)" (RG 29), is never appeased. Their universe is relative, where pragmatism and perspectivism are but sources of further confusion, as the following extract shows:

GUIL: In the morning, the sun would be easterly. I think we can assume that.
ROS: That it's morning?
GUIL: If it is, and the sun is over there (*his right hand as he faces the audience*) for instance, that (*front*) would be northerly. On the other hand, if it is not morning and the sun is over there (*his left*) ... that ... (*lamely*) would still be northerly. (*picking up*) To put it another way, if we came from down there (*front*) and it is morning, the sun would be up there (*his left*), and if it is actually over there (*his right*) and it's still morning, we must have come from up there (behind him), and if that is southerly (*his left*) and the sun is really over there (*front*), then it's the afternoon. However, if none of these is the case -
ROS: Why don't you go and have a look?
GUIL: Pragmatism?! (...) (RG 42-3)

Yet, within this illogical universe, a kind of mysterious order, a 'logic at work' as Guil says, seems to exist. This order probably derives from the plot of Hamlet, as the image of the chain of events - which brings to mind the Medieval concept of the Chain of Being - suggests:

GUIL: We've been caught up. Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else and is set off by it. (RG 30)

Stoppard's way to account for the paradoxical ideas of relativity and a tragic ordering principle, of strong pragmatism and a perspectivism so extreme that it questions the very idea of the self, is to place his play in a metatheatrical frame, which enables him to revise contradictory concepts, without the necessity of opting for one final solution. The Player is the character who best functions as a mouthpiece for Stoppard's ideas; he takes to the furthest extreme the Shakespearean equation of man and mask, and asserts his sole identity as an actor:

> PLAYER: (...) We're actors -we're the opposite of people. (...) (RG 47)
>
> PLAYER: We're actors .... We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade (...) (RG 47)

When Guil complains that they don't know what is going on, what they should do next, in sum, "how to act" (RG 49), the Player tells him to "act natural" (RG 49), for there are no absolute truths, truth having to be "taken on trust", as what is "taken to be true" (RG 49). Unlike the Shakespearean tragic universe, where the truth of an odious crime serves to justify Hamlet's revenge, and unlike Beckett's world where the lack of absolute truths leads to a deep nihilism, Stoppard's universe is one where the arbitrary, the lack of ordering principles and the very lack of stable identities is suggested.

In a word, what Stoppard does in incorporating the Shakespearean and the Beckettian worldviews in RG is to philosophize on the human situation and the existence of free will in the twentieth century: to choose a role or to be thrust into a role, i.e., chance and choice as the opposing forces that direct our lives. Just as Shakespeare explores the moral dilemmas of Elizabethan England, Beckett and Stoppard express the anxieties and doubts of the present age. However, by reworking the two plays, Stoppard asserts, even if obliquely, that the world today cannot be encompassed in the form of drama as rendered by Shakespeare nor must it be viewed in the absurdist manner of Beckett. An alternative form is bound to emerge

out of the very confrontation of Elizabethan tragedy and absurdist tragicomedy.

This form is precisely Stoppard's self-conscious metatheatrical theatre, which rather than trying to render the order of the universe in the form of tragedy or tragicomedy, opts for a self-reflexive reconsideration of the play's process of composition. Under this light, the box image used by Stoppard to suggest confinement in life can also stand for the idea of past dramatic tradition as exercising some kind of pressure upon the writer, somewhat in the sense that Eliot understands tradition. If Beckett stands at the edge of this box, finding only silence and darkness all around it, Stoppard instead, envisages the possibilities of re-creation within the realm of that very box. His play is a game, where the main player is the writer: the rules of writing are the conventions of the Western literary tradition which he consciously re-works, and the audience, aware of the fact that he is playing with their expectancies, plays the part of producing its own version of truth. He refuses to opt for either the Shakespearean or the Beckettian ways of viewing the world, though not discarding them either. These two systems of thought are frames within which people play their parts in life and which permits them to formulate questions and assume truths which keep them going; as Guil says, grasping the interchangeability of these sets of frames:

> ROS: I remember when there were no questions.
> GUIL: There were always questions. To exchange one set for another is no great matter. (RG 29)

While the well-constructed play of Shakespeare mirrors a world that though complex and transitorial, had solid bases upon which to rest- mainly the concepts of the Chain of Being, the divine order of the universe reflected in nature, the micro-macro cosmos analogies - Beckett's and Stoppard's universes lack this solidity. Beckett, more pessimistic than Stoppard, deconstructs the traditional concepts of identity, reality, the well-made play, the necessity of a plot, creating a new form of theatre labelled absurdist, which reflects the contemporary changing of values.

Being inserted in the same épistème as Beckett, as they are contemporaries if we think in terms of the second half of the twentieth century, Stoppard does not need to repeat the Beckettian innovations mentioned above. Yet, he cannot ignore them, and write naively as if Beckett and other playwrights had not existed. He must acknowledge and reassert what came before him. His way of doing this is through parody, by re-inventing the Shakespearean plot in a Beckettian universe.

Like Beckett, Stoppard raises questions which he does not answer, since he does not have the pretentiousness to possess the key to solve the mystery of human nature. Stoppard's commitment to raising questions, rather than providing answers, becomes clear when Ros says "It is all questions" (RG 33). The implication is that the way in which one interprets the nature of the universe is questionable. No one single worldview can be trusted because metaphysical truths are

not verifiable. Different cosmovisions gain or lose validity depending on the viewer.

It is my hypothesis that the emerging philosophy of RG comes from the Player's mouth. If the twentieth century problems cannot be resolved as Hamlet resolved his, if twentieth century man is closer to Prufrock and his endless indecisions, still the Player adverts that "you can't go through life questioning your situtation at every turn" (RG 49). Like characters in a play, one must act on assumptions, rather than based on truth. There is no time for the individual in the twentieth century to search for and confirm truths, as there was for Hamlet to "catch the conscience of the king" before fulfilling his revenge. On the other hand, one should not, like Didi and Gogo, wait for someone or something to reveal the truth of one's life. Like Prufrock, twentieth century man is caught in a web of decisions and indecisions under the pressure of time. As the Player points out, "one acts on assumptions" for "truth is only that which is taken to be true" (RG 49).

In a certain sense, that is precisely Stoppard's strategy in rewriting Hamlet: he does not need to create an entirely 'original' plot, but rather he entertains the audience with assumptions about the life of Ros, Guil, and the Players outside the Shakespearean script. The game Stoppard plays with the audience is that of coin-tossing, where one side of the coin stands for the Shakespearean tragic universe and the other for a twentieth century relativistic world. Stoppard's strategy is to transmute the discussion of a life after death to the

twentieth century context; instead of repeating the famous "to be or not to be" as Shakespeare has written it, he tries to articulate this same question in Ros and Guil's fragmentary idiom. In RG, it is not Hamlet, the great tragic hero, who voices the concerns with life and death, but rather the clownish modern anti-heroes, Ros and Guil, who bring to the twentieth century the problems that Hamlet faces.

In sum, in RG's a worldview is built on the tension of the opposite views of Shakespeare and Beckett. The play's framework of intertextualities, ranging from Elizabethan to contemporary theatre, reactivates reflections upon the relation of reality and the theatre, the theatricality of life, the role of the audience, the nature of language and the process of writing; thus, the cosmovision enhanced in RG is basically one marked by the twentieth century emphasis on self-reflexivity, becoming a theatre of criticism.

NOTES:

[1] FRYE, N. Sobre Shakespeare. São Paulo, Edusp, 1992. p. 109-111. In the introduction, Frye particularly focusses on the need for a historical perspective, so that we can investigate the convictions and values of a society totally different from our own. On the other hand, Frye also defends the idea of Shakespeare as our contemporary, and the relevancy of the issues he raised for our time.

[2]GORDON, G. Extract from an Interview with Tom Stoppard. In: BAREHAM, T. ed., Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers* and *Travesties*. London, Macmillan, 1993. p.65

[3]The transitional, complex and contradictory character of the Elizabethan Age is particularly analysed by the historian Jean DELUMEAU who refuses to label the period as either walking towards scientificism and rationalism or moving towards an anti-scientific spirit. DELUMEAU diagnoses the period as "an ocean of contradictions, a concert, sometimes strident, of divergent aspirations, a difficult concomitance of a desire for power and a still babbling science, of a desire for beauty and an appetite for the horrible, a mixture of simplicity and complexity, of purity and sensuality, of charity and hatred.(...) In these lies its disconcerting character, its complexity and its endless potentialities".The literary critic W. R. ELTON also emphasizes the shifting from the medieval to the Renaissance worlds, by closely considering the medieval analogical worldview relating God and man, which though under the process of dissolution, still frames much of the thought of the Renaissance mind. (See DELUMEAU, J. A Civilização do Renascimento. Lisboa, Estampa, 1984. p. 22. ELTON, Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age. In: MUIR, K. & SCHOENBAUM, S. eds., A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971. p. 185; and also HUSSEY, M. The World of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries. London, Macmillan, 1992. p. 42-107)

[4]BRIGGS, J. This Stage-Play World: English Literature and its Background 1580-1625. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983. p.6.

[5]HUSSEY cites Peter Apian's Cosmographia (1539) which illustrates the Ptolemaic cosmos an onion-like diagram with transparent spheres, moving at different speeds, round the earth, and Thomas Digges's scheme (1576), where the sun replaces the earth as the centre of the circle as the two main cosmographies of the time. In both, the divine essence of the universe remains untouched: God is the centre and origin of all things. (See HUSSEY, p.45)

[6] See JUNG, C. Psychological Aspects of the Modern Archetype. In: _____. The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. London, Routledge, 1975. p. 106.

[7]Many Renaissance authors mention the concept of the Chain of Being such as Sir Walter Raleigh in The History of the World (1614), Francis Bacon in Novum Organum (1620) and Timothy Bright in A Treatise of Melancholie (1586). Other texts of the time, such as Sebonde's, Fortescue's and Hidgen's, all quoted by the Shakespearean scholar E.M.W. TYLLIARD, also help us understand the Chain. In Natural Theology, Sebonde describes the mirroring relationship between the

macrocosm - where God, the angels and the planets exist and the microcosm - the church, the state, men, animals and the vegetative and mineral spheres-, where any disturbance reverberates in all of the Chain's segments: "We must believe that the angels are in marvellous and inconceivable numbers, because the honour of a king consists in a great crowd of his vassals, while his disgrace or shame consists of their paucity. (...) Further, if in material nature there are numberless kinds of stone herbs trees fishes birds four-footed beasts and above these an infinitude of men, it must be said likewise that there are many kinds of angels.(...) (...) the elements and all the smallest things are reckoned in the lowest grade, vegetative things in the second, sensitive in the third, and man in the fourth as sovereign. Within the human range are seen different states from the great to the least: such as labourers merchants burgesses knights barons counts dukes kings and a single emperor as monarch.(...)But this well-ordered multitude leads up to a single head: in precisely the same way as we see among the elements fire the first in dignity; among the fishes the dolphin; among the birds the eagle;among the beasts the lion; and among men the emperor".Sir John FORTESCUE's account of the Chain explains and classifies man's position in the universe, as well as everything else that exists, from the most abject being to the very idea of God: "(...)hot things are in harmony with cold; dry with moist; heavy with light; high with low. In this order angel is set over angel, rank upon rank in the Kingdom of heaven; man is set over man, beast over beast, bird over bird, fish over fish, on the earth, in the air, and in the sea; so that there is no worm that crawls upon the ground, no bird that flies on high, no fish that swims in the depths, which the chain of this order binds not in most harmonious concord. (...) So that there is nothing which the bond of order does not embrace.And since God has thus regulated all creatures, it is impious to think that he left unregulated the human race, which he made the highest of all earthly creatures.(...)". HIDGEN, a very popular writer of the Tudor period summarizes the concept of degree in Polychronicon: "(...)In the universal order of things the top of an inferior class touches the bottom of a superior: as for instance, oysters, which occupying as it were, the lowest position in the class of animals cling to the earth without motion and possess the sense of touch alone. The upper surface of the earth is in contact with the lower surface of the water; the highest part of water touches the lowest part of the air, and so by the ladder of ascent to the outermost sphere of the universe. So also the noblest entity in the categories of bodies, the human body, when its humours are evenly balanced, touches the fringe of the next class above it, namely the human soul, which occupies the lowest rank in the spiritual order.(...)". (See TYLLIARD, E.M.N. Shakespeare's History Plays. London, Penguin, 1969. p. 18-27.)

[8]TYLLIARD, Shakespeare's Problem Plays. London, Chatto & Windus, 1950. p.30.

[9]Apart from the Chain of Being's placement of man between God and the animals, there are two other key theories of human nature: the doctrine of the temperaments and the theory of the threefold nature of the human soul. The doctrine of the Humours holds that man's temperament results from the combination of the four humours existing in the human body -choler, blood, phlegm and melancholy or black bile. Physical appearance, psychological characteristics and human health depend on the balance of these humours, which exist in lesser or greater quantity in all human beings. To the four humours correspond the four elements of nature - fire,

air, water and earth. In each of these elements coexist two of the four existing principles of hot, cold, moist and dry. Thus, more than a theory of personality as we understand the term today, the Renaissance theory of the humours is in itself a cosmology for in its correspondences and analogies, it encompasses nature as a whole. The theory of the four temperaments is present in Hamlet with special emphasis on the exploration of the melancholic personality, which is defined as having the nature of the earth, cold, and dry, being heavy, malicious, slow and loving the black colour. DELUMEAU analyses the "Renaissance melancholy" as characterizing the birth of modern man and his accompanying feelings of solitude and smallness, for men are fragile sinners, subjected to the threats of the Devil and the will of the stars. In fact, melancholy is alone a preferred subject among Renaissance art and literature: Timothy Bright's Treatise of Melancholy (1586), Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), Albrecht Dürer's painting Melancolia I (1517) are some of the period's most quoted examples. Dürer's melancholic female figure can be taken as Hamlet's counterpart, as certain common features are easily perceived: fixed and meditative look of the woman as if deep in meditation, at once absorbed in herself and speculative, her neglection of clothes which resembles Ophelia's description of Hamlet as having "his doublet all unbrac'd; no hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd, ungarter'd, and down gyved to his ankle; pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other."(Ham 2.1.87-100). The Elizabethan audience, either because of their familiarity with scholarly treatises on melancholy, paintings or other plays on the subject -i.e Webster's The Duchess of Malfi- or because of the theory of temperaments is, in fact, part of the common knowledge of the time, is able to easily infer from Hamlet's black clothes and strange behaviour that he suffers from melancholy, considered an emotional and physical disease. Another Renaissance way of defining man is through the threefold nature of his soul -the vegetative, the animal and the rational - which accounts for the opposing forces existing inside him. HUSSEY cites the schemes of the Renaissance scholars C. Bovillus (1508) and John Davies (1599) as two possibilites for accounting for the theory of the threefold nature of the human soul. Basically, both authors say that man shares the vegetative soul -Arboe- with all living things; Equus, the sensible soul, he shares with the animals, and the superior soul, centered on reason is what distinguishes him from all other creatures, and approximates him to God. In Hamlet, there are many references to the various souls of man and their bearings in ruling his life: when Hamlet condemns the hasty marriage of his mother, it is of the lowest soul- the one which lacks reason- that he refers to; all of Hamlet's complaints about the unnatural remarriage of his mother are based on the supposed difference that should exist between animals and human beings. (See DELUMEAU,p.163. See also HUSSEY, p.25-31.)

[10] Among other critics, Elton draws parallels between the thought of Shakespeare and Montaigne highlighting cultural relativism. See ELTON, Shakespeare and the thought of his Age. IN: MUIR, K. ed. A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971. p. 191-192. All the quotations from Montaigne's work will be followed by the number and title of the essay, as well as the page number, and are taken from HAZLITT, W. C. ed., Great Books of the Western World: Montaigne. London, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952.

[11] BRIGGS, p. 6-7.

[12] RIGHTER quoted in BRIGGS, p. 197.

[13] CLEMEN, W. Shakespeare's Dramatic Art. London, Methuen, 1972. p. 186-187. See also STAROBINSKI who, by presenting central themes in Montaigne's Essais, such as death, love, freedom, language, public life, and by interpreting them as part of a logic which denunciates the world of appearances, of illusion and artifice, furnishes a most encompassing panel to which we can compare Shakespeare thought. STAROBINSKI, J. Montaigne em Movimento. São Paulo, Cia das Letras, 1993.

[14] See PIRANDELLO, L. The Art of Humour. Massachusets Review, 6:515-20, Spring/Summer, 1965. p. 517.

15 The king's death throws the whole country into danger. The King is analogically identified with the country - king and kingdom being one and the same - as the reference to King Hamlet as "the majesty of buried Denmark" shows. Fortinbras's threats of invading Denmark are the representation of an exterior danger; however, a more pervasive "internal" evil disturbs the country: its people, deprived of a ruler, lack a model for their lives and behaviour. Thus, with the death of the king, both internally and externally is the health of state threatened. King Hamlet's assassination - recalling the biblical passage of Abel and Cain - and Queen Gertrude's incestous remarriage reverberate in the familiar, social and political spheres. All the courtiers, knowingly or unknowingly, live under the shadow of an incestuous marriage, a crown usurpation and an odious fratricide; corruption soils their lives, values and relationships. They must assume masks and hide behind tapestries in order to survive in this corrupted universe. Values such as friendship, love, and honour are undermined; through the courtiers'silent cumplicity, they become agents of power, manipulated to maintain a stately order that is evil and unnatural. Examples are many: Polonius advocates a moral conduct based on truth and straightfowardness which he is ready to betray when spying on his son, on his daughter and on Hamlet; Claudius, supposedly God's chosen deputy on earth, is in fact the origin and source of evil; Queen Gertrude, the paradigm of womanhood, an apparently loving and caring wife and mother, maculates Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia; Ophelia's love for Hamlet is soiled by her sense of duty to her brother and father; Laertes and Hamlet's friendship suffers from Hamlet's inadvertent murder of Polonius and his partial responsibility in Ophelia's madness, while Laertes is easily won by Claudius. The only true friendship that resists corruption and remains truthful is that between Horatio and Hamlet, but yet it is counterposed by the treacheries of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as well as by Laertes, who act as agents to Claudius.

[16] BRADLEY, A. C. Shakespearean Tragedy. New York, St. Martin's Press 1965. p. 23.

[17] MACK, M. The World of Hamlet. In:JUMP, J. ed. Shakespeare's Hamlet: a Selection of Critical Essays. London, Mamillan, 1970. p.262.

[18] Some years after Eugene Ionesco had presented The Bald Singer, Samuel Beckett's Godot became a great and unexpected public success. These two playwrights

have started a new theatrical convention that would be labelled by Martin Esslin the theatre of the Absurd. (See ESSLIN, M. The Theatre of the Absurd. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978.)

[19]STOPPARD, T. Something to Declare. Sunday Times, London, February 25th, 1968. p.4.

[20]DUTTON, R. Modern Tragicomedy and the British Tradition. Sussex, Harvester, 1986. p.9.

[21]STYAN, J.L. The Dark Comedy: The Development Of Modern Comic Tragedy. London, Cambridge University Press, 1974. p. 36.

[22]MERCIER, V. Beckett/Beckett. New York, Grove Press, 1977. p.50.

[23]ESSLIN, The Theatre of the Absurd, p.85.

24ESSLIN, p. 87-88.

25ESSLIN, p. 88.

26DUTTON, p. 135.

[27]In selecting which extracts from Hamlet to incorporate in his play, Stoppard privileges the scenes in which Ros and Guil appear as power instruments in the hands of Claudius, and where the players' art is manipulated 'to catch the king's conscience'.

28 An instance where freedom of speech does not correspond to freedom of action is when Didi and Gogo, despite their decision to leave, remain on stage. (WG80).

7. CONCLUSION: TOM STOPPARD AS A POSTMODERN SCRIPTOR

Mundus Universus Exercet Histrioniam.
(Petronious)

Because writing carries within it always an element of death, the tragic literary work - or simply the serious written work in general, the work which deals with life and death honestly - often turns out to be in some way about itself ... That is to say, a work about death often modulates readily, if eerily, into a work about literature.
(W. J. ONG)

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to elucidate that a traditional concept of originality is inadequate for judging Stoppard's artistic value, which must be viewed within a poststructuralist theoretical framework, where the concepts of parody, intertextuality and metatheatre, as employed by authors such as Bakhtin, Barthes, Hutcheon and Waugh, take the forefront of the debates. In the light of these literary theories, the much criticised parodic nature of RG is legitimized as a valid creative procedure inserted within the trend of contemporary writing which privileges text-consciousness.

Stoppard's metatheatre derives most of its material from literary tradition. Allusions, parodies, and reworkings in terms of themes, characters and devices highlight intertextual procedures and turn RG's complex process of composition into one of its very themes: the derivative nature of Stoppard's play becomes the very subject upon which the audience/readers will reflect upon.

By superimposing his version of the Hamlet plot on that of Beckett's Godot as well as by incorporating many other intertextualities within his play, Stoppard, unlike his tied-up characters, is able to break away from the Shakespearean matrix. The reframing of literary forms - tragedy, tragicomedy - and themes - the meaning of life and death, fate and free will, chance and divine providence - results in a new and original synthesis which redirects issues raised by Shakespeare, Beckett, Pirandello, Eliot among others.

RG becomes a multi-voiced text where Stoppard invites the audience to relate to other texts and worldviews. By playing with roles - the roles of author, actor and audience and by proposing a sort of authorial unreliability, Stoppard forces us to surpass our quiet and passive voyeurism and become an integrant part of the performance.

In portraying characters who change behaviour, language and even identity according to the frame within which they are operating, Stoppard reproduces the contemporary experience of reality as a set of interchangeable frames. Different frames, marked by different language styles, are responsible for the construction not only of different worlds but also of different subjects: characters neither purely Shakespearean nor Beckettian, neither Elliotian nor Pirandellian.

The clash of contradictory universes, represented by Shakespeare's and Beckett's forms of theatricality, gives birth to a language style which contains a mixture of seriousness and frivolity, a

style which sometimes conforms and sometimes defies grammar, punctuation and sematics, self-reflexively turning upon itself.

Stoppard's use of language is illusion-breaking as it sistematically disturbs the sense of reality by foregrounding the process of textual construction and fictionality itself. As a postmodern writer, he self-consciously constructs a fragmentary text, challenging the validity and coherence of a common public language understood by all; instead, he priviledges the writing process itself.

In illuminating the theme of death, and placing it within a metatheatrical context, Stoppard at once interrogates the nature of the theatre and the very nature of our world and the human condition; in other words, death becomes the objective correlative of art, since art is a form of evasion of death. Ros and Guil's endless pursuit of understanding their destiny is Stoppard's rephrasing of the death theme developed in Hamlet and Godot. To a certain extent, it is the Player's vision of death which reflects the concern of the artist. For the Player, life is equated with the theatre and death with silence. Only through art can men overcome the fear of death and achieve immortality.

In placing one world against the other, in making them collide and retreat, Stoppard lays bare the very process of world construction, which stands also for the process of writing itself. He explores issues such as what *happens* when different worlds are placed in confrontation or when the boundaries between worlds are violated, interrogating the nature of these ficitonal worlds and of our own real

world as well. Metatheatrically interpreted, the problematization of worlds acquires the status of a critical survey of the continuities and discontinuities of literary history, namely the relationship of literary forms and the worldviews they project.

The Shakespearean and the Beckettian universes parodied in RG have been described by the visual metaphor of the circle and its tangent.[1] The circularity of Beckett's plot and the linearity of Shakespeare's play form the contradictory structure of RG, at once linear and circular, mirroring the co-existence of the optimistic Shakespearean and the pessimistic Beckettian visions that pervade the play.

Placing these visions of reality side by side, Stoppard explores the potentialites of both worlds. His emergent view is a mid-term between the Shakespearean and the Beckettian positions: on the one hand, he shows characters who perish because of their lack of vision, as in Beckett's work; on the other, he entertains the idea that they could have changed the course of events, as Hamlet does in Shakespeare's play. The discourse of the Player suggests that despite his limitations, man must strive to overcome nihilism by taking some kind of action, even if that means acting on assumptions.

Although Stoppard borrows extensively from both plays, he neither vindicates nor rejects any one worldview; rather, he leaves the audience the opportunity of devising their own perspective, much in the same way that he lets Ros and Guil devise their destinies. His unwillingness to opt for one single view corroborates his position that

there is no static viewpoint, "no safe point around which everything takes its proper place, so that you see things flat and see how they relate to each other."[2]

Stoppard, thus, inserts himself in the contemporary trend of twentieth century writing, which states the death of the author. He becomes, at once, a special reader and excellent critic of the past tradition, employing parody and intertextuality as a way of reacting against a monological text. RG does not accumulate influences, but rather it assimilates and transforms various texts.[3]

While in Shakespeare the idea of the **theatrum mundi** is central, the world and the stage fusing and being one and the same space, in RG the stage functions as the place from where one can, self-consciously, observe life. Normand BERLIN has remarked that

> Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is art that studies art, and therefore, serving as a document, dramatic criticism, as a play presenting ideas on Hamlet, on Elizabethan drama, on theatrical art, and by so doing, commenting on the life that art reveals.[4]

In other words, while Hamlet holds a mirror up to nature, RG holds "the mirror of art to the art that holds the mirror up to nature"[5], making the audience become twice removed from the events of the stage. What one confronts watching the play is the very possibility of theatricality: how the world becomes stage and how men and women become players. In this sense, Stoppard uses the Hamlet matrix to reframe questions about the human condition.

RG's framework of intertextualities, ranging from Elizabethan to contemporary theatre, reactivates reflections upon the relation of reality and the theatre, the theatricality of life, the role of the audience, the nature of language, the process of composition itself. The incorporation of literary forms and themes from pre-existing texts and their integration in new frames results in a different and original synthesis, which redirects issues raised by Shakespeare, Beckett, Pirandello and Eliot, among others. RG becomes a multi-voiced text where, through parody and intertextuality, the audience is constantly invited to relate to these other texts and worldviews. A text which uses parody as an intertextual tool reflects our contemporary culture which relies on symbiosis, amalgam and transformation.

The many intertextualities of RG confer on the play great richness and density for each intertextual reference opens up an alternative reading, which expands the semantics of the intertext. The textual fragments integrated in RG are not, however, lost, but form a whole which recall the entire universe from which they have been taken. The problematic of originality in the play is resolved by means of the substitution of the concept of the author understood as an individual creative conscience, for the notion of the writer as **scriptor** who re-works 'tradition', and highlights the intertextual nature of the text, subscribing to a Bakhtinian view of literature as a multiplicity of voices.

NOTES:

[1]LEE, R. The Circle and Its Tangent. Theoria 33:37-43, October 1969.

[2]STOPPARD, T. Second Interview, p. 144.

[3]KRISTEVA, J. La Révolution du Language Poétique. Paris, Seuil, 1974. p.60

[4]BERLIN, N. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead:* Theatre of Criticism. Modern Drama, 16. December 1973. p. 276.

[5]BERLIN, p. 270.

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